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THE CAPTAIN OF THE "S. I. G.'S"

"Carter and the three men on bases followed suit, sprinting from bag to bag like the wind." FRONTISPIECE. *See Page* 149.

The Staten Island Giants Series

THE CAPTAIN OF THE "S. I. G.'S"

BY

ETTA ANTHONY BAKER

Author of "The Girls of Fairmount," "The Youngsters of Centerville," "Frolics at Fairmount," etc.

With Illustrations by
H. Burgess

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TO WILL

THE JOLLIEST "BIG BOY" I KNOW

"Then here's to our boyhood, its gold and its gray!
The stars of its winter, the dews of its May!
And when we have done with our life-lasting toys,
Dear Father, take care of thy children, The Boys!"

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THE CHARACTERS

Carter Carroll	Captain of the "S. I. G.'s"
Mr. and Mrs. Carroll, Minnie, Dixie Doodle	The Rest of the Family.
Sidney Armstrong, Johnny Porter, Arthur Boynton	Members of the "S. I. G.'s"
Ida Grant, Iva Grant	The Twins.
Mrs. Harper	The Friend of the "S. I. G.'s"
Captain Truitt	of the "U. B. B. A."

THE CAPTAIN OF THE "S. I. G.'S"

CHAPTER I

A Break in the "S. I. G.'S"

The Carrolls lived on Staten Island, the bit of land with wooded hills and wide stretches of beach, that pops up unexpectedly between the upper and lower bays of New York's great harbor. At first glance it seems as though it had tried to separate the two bays entirely; but if so, it evidently changed its mind and allowed the Narrows to connect them. It surveys its watery surroundings as though it meant to say: "Take care! I've got my eye on you!" Staten Islanders know the "ups and downs" of life. Rome with her seven hills is quite thrown in the shade by the Island's uncounted heights, but the view that greets one from their tops amply repays the climb.

The Carroll house was a large, old-fashioned, homey sort of a place, with a good-sized garden at the side and back. It had wide piazzas overlooking the upper bay, giving a fine view of the Statue of Liberty, the Immigrant Station on Ellis Island, the Robbins' Reef lighthouse, and the military post on Governor's Island, and also showing the towers and skyscrapers of lower New York

itself, with the bridges and shipping of two of the world's busiest water thoroughfares, the North and the East rivers, which join forces at the Battery.

The crop of boys on that particular block was a good one. Minnie, the Carrolls' maid, vowed that there were at least a thousand, and perhaps they seemed that many to her when they tramped through her clean kitchen, or made the Saturday's baking of fresh doughnuts or cookies disappear as if by magic. But boys of fourteen or fifteen have powers in the eating line that are little short of magical, after all. In reality there were only nine boys on the block, including Carter Carroll himself — good boys, all of them, especially when they were asleep, as Mr. Carroll used to say. Minnie liked them, too, in spite of her grumbling, because she knew that she was a prime favorite with them all.

Carter's real name was Lindsay Carteret Carroll, but he always insisted so strenuously upon the use of his middle name, that his friends had grown into the habit of calling him Carter. He was a tall, slender, good-looking lad, very popular with the boys in spite of his inclination to be somewhat dictatorial. He had no really bad habits; nevertheless he had not as yet reached the point where his friends feared an early death for him on account of excessive goodness. He was generous, and loyal to his chums; in fact, a lovable, manly boy.

On the first Saturday in June, a bright, sunny day, with more than a hint of summer in the air, the boys were gathered, as usual, on the Carroll piazza, all talking at once in tones so loud that the passer-by might

have been excused for thinking that most of their number were deaf. Some one had proposed that they form themselves into a club, and much heated discussion ensued as to the kind of club that would give the most fun during the coming vacation.

Mrs. Harper, who lived across the street, heard the whole argument from start to finish. She was an invalid, but fortunately not a nervous one. Carter was her especial favorite, but she was fond of all the boys and took a keen interest in everything that concerned them. They were so used to seeing her reading or sewing in her reclining chair in the wide bay window of the Harper house, that they almost forgot she was there. Sometimes she was unable to sit up at all. This happened to be one of her bad days, but she had the happy faculty of getting enjoyment out of little things, so she listened to the controversy with eager interest.

"Let's make it the 'Boy Scouts,'" Sidney Armstrong urged earnestly.

"Oh, no! We could n't start the 'Scouts,'" Carter explained. "I read all about them the other day. It's a big organization, and we want this to be just ourselves. Besides, the 'Scouts' are too much like the 'U. B. B. A.', and we're all in that now." He referred to the "United Boys' Brigade of America," which had several companies on the Island.

"That's so," Sid agreed cheerfully. "How about a 'Tennis Club,' then?"

But again there were objections, as some of the boys never played tennis. A "Beach Club" was also turned

down, because it would last only during the summer while the beaches were open.

"We might be an 'Indian Club,'" Johnny Porter suggested tentatively, then looked perfectly blank at the shout of laughter which followed.

"Excuse me!" Sid remarked jokingly. "You may be a blockhead if you want to, Johnny, but count me out."

Even then the joke failed to dawn upon Johnny. He was the youngest of the nine, and so innocent at times that the rest found ample opportunity for teasing him; but to their credit they seldom availed themselves of it, because he was a manly boy and they were all fond of him.

"Why not make it a 'Baseball Team,'" Carter said finally, after several propositions had been offered and rejected. "We're just the right number, and that need n't keep us from doing anything else we want to do. What do you say?"

The idea seemed to meet with general approval, for more reasons than one.

"That'll be dandy!"

"Just the thing!"

"We all play, too!"

"Yes, I know we do," Carter added; "and if we're a regular club we can challenge the 'Stars.'"

"And do them up, too!" Sid amended confidently. This consideration alone was enough to make the boys decide in favor of the proposed team.

The "Stars" was the name of a baseball team from

another part of the suburb. They were older boys, most of them sixteen or over, and some of them had been decidedly disagreeable. They bragged unceasingly of their prowess on the diamond, yet persistently refused to prove it as far as the nine were concerned, on the plea that they never played against any but organized teams. This was thorn number one. But besides this, they had made themselves troublesome in many ways, not only by jibes and taunts at the "Kid Glove Contingent," as they had nicknamed the boys, but by actually appropriating balls, gloves, and bats. A game on the field was out of the question unless the players left their possessions in charge of some of the smaller boys. Of course the missing articles turned up mysteriously sooner or later, usually later, but that did not lessen the annoyance caused by their disappearance.

"What about a name for the team?" Johnny asked anxiously.

The boys thought hard for a moment.

"We might call ourselves the 'Invincibles,'" Carter proposed, adding modestly: "We're all cracker-jack players."

"I think that would be a better name," Arthur Boynton burst out eagerly.

"That? What?" Carter questioned.

"Why, 'Cracker-Jacks!' It's newer, you know. And it's good, too," he added, smacking his lips as he recalled the tempting packages with their crisp, yellow contents. "Why, when I come out of the water, even before I go to my bath-house, I always — "

"Yes, we know you do," Carter interrupted hastily. Arthur was inclined to be long-winded and had to be headed off occasionally. He was an only child, and at home his slightest utterance was treated with deep respect, conspicuous chiefly by its absence when the boys were his listeners. "But we can't talk cracker-jack now," Carter went on decisively; "we've got to choose a name for the team."

"I like the 'Giants,' myself," one of the other boys said hesitatingly. "They're dandies, even if they're not in the lead just yet."

"That's first rate!" "I like that name, too!" and "Just the thing!" were some of the enthusiastic remarks which greeted the suggestion.

"And we ought to stand by the home team," Carter added, as an afterthought.

After a few minutes' discussion, the name was decided upon, and the matter practically settled when, as usual, Arthur Boynton upset the whole arrangement. He was a slow thinker, but he always had something to say on every question, even if he left the post after the rest had reached the line. His suggestions, or amendments, rather, were usually sensible, but they were not appreciated by the boys because of their tardiness. Besides, Arthur was always so aggravatingly sure of himself: it put the others on the defensive.

"We can't call our team the 'Giants,'" he began positively.

"There you go, Art!" Carter said impatiently. "You're always sure to wait until a thing's settled

before you begin to kick. What's the matter with the 'Giants,' I'd like to know?"

"Nothing's the matter with them," was the sulky rejoinder; "only people might think we're the New York team, that's all."

"So likely!" Sid muttered sarcastically.

"And they've probably got a patent, or a copyright, or whatever you call it, on the name," Arthur went on obstinately; "so we can't use it even if we want to."

"We can, too," Carter retorted sharply. "We'll change it to 'Staten Island Giants' and call ourselves the 'S. I. G.'s,' so there!"

So it was decided, and the "S. I. G.'s," with Carter Carroll as captain, began its existence that morning by adjourning to the school field, and practicing strenuously for the rest of the day. The thought of a game with the "Stars" was incentive enough, if incentive were needed, to make them buckle down to hard work. They determined not to challenge their rivals until they felt themselves strong enough to meet them with at least a fair chance of success.

They also decided, very sensibly, that although they were organized as a baseball team, they would not permit that fact to bar them from other sports. The club was to be simply a bond to cement the friendship which already existed between the members, and a very lasting bond it proved to be.

Just two days after the formation of the "S. I. G.'s," something occurred unexpectedly which threatened at

first to upset the team's plans completely. Sid Armstrong, Carter's special friend, and the team's best pitcher, learned that he was to spend the summer and the early autumn with cousins in New York, while his mother and father were abroad. They were to sail that very week.

The firm for which Sid's father worked had decided to establish a branch office in London, and Mr. Armstrong was commissioned to superintend the opening of the new office and to put its affairs into good running order. As Mrs. Armstrong's health had not been robust for some time, he was anxious to take her with him, but neither of them liked the idea of leaving their boy with strangers for so long a time, and they could not take him abroad on account of the expense. Then, too, they disliked breaking into his school routine in the autumn, so Mrs. Armstrong gave up all hope of the trip until the Vandynes, cousins of Mr. Armstrong, learned of his dilemma, and offered to take charge of Sid. They were wealthy New Yorkers, who owned an imposing residence on Fifth Avenue and an even more imposing "cottage" at Newport. In their city house alone they probably employed more servants than could be counted on the nine's whole block, but neither of them knew how to enjoy their millions.

"You see, they have no children, for one thing," Mrs. Armstrong explained to Mrs. Carroll, when she called to ask help in making her decision; "and what's a home without a child in it? Then they belong to the 'fusser' class," she added laughingly; "regular old maids, both

of them! They take everything so hard. I don't see how they will ever survive Sid's careless ways, that is if I decide to send him to them. It would be a severe shock to their nervous systems, I'm afraid."

"A shock that would do them good, probably," Mrs. Carroll replied with a smile. "Don't worry over it. Sid 's a manly boy and can take care of himself. Perhaps he'll have a beneficial effect on the 'fussers,' who knows? Don't say 'if' you decide to send him. Remember, dear, the best thing you can do for your boy is to take care of his mother."

Mrs. Armstrong stared so hard that Mrs. Carroll burst out laughing, but quickly grew grave again.

"I guess you overlooked that view of the case, did n't you?" she asked seriously. "I think health for his mother is a boy's best present, even if he himself apparently has to be set aside while she is gaining it. And then, too, a change is often good for these boys of ours. Probably Sid needs it as much as you do. An only child is very apt to think the world moves just for his convenience. I can see it plainly at times, in Carter; and it's not surprising when you come to think of it — no brothers or sisters with whom to share things. Now do be sensible! Write to the Vandynes and accept their offer, and get ready for your trip with a free mind. The invitation certainly shows a kindly spirit on their part. And put all that nonsense about neglecting your boy and deserting him out of your head before you start, or the trip will do you no good at all. There! my lecture's over! The audience is dismissed!"

And the "audience" departed, much comforted by her friend's sensible view of the case.

During the next few days Sid made life miserable for the rest of the boys by his constant bragging about the relatives with whom he was to stay. They did not understand that he was trying to get used to the idea of the separation from his parents, and was doing it as much to convince himself of his good fortune as to impress them.

"You ought to see their house," he said enthusiastically. "It's a regular castle almost, and they keep a butler and footmen, and ever so many other servants. They have carriages and automobiles and riding horses, too; and at Newport they'll have their yacht. I'll see the big tennis tournaments at the Casino, too."

"So we've heard," Carter remarked drily, when Sid launched into a description of the Vandyne glories for about the twentieth time.

"If I can man — that is, if I can find time," Sid corrected himself hurriedly, "I intend to ask you over while I'm there. They're going to give me riding lessons in Central Park every day, they told mother, so I'll be kept pretty busy. And at Newport we'll be on the yacht a good deal. But I'll try to have you over some time while I'm there."

"Think you'll be lonesome without your mother?" Carter asked bluntly, ignoring the very uncertain invitation.

"Oh, no, I'll be too busy," Sid answered with lofty indifference, but he flushed guiltily as he spoke. "Of

course I'll miss her some," he added, honestly, a vision of her gentle, loving face rising before him. "Guess every boy'd miss his mother, no matter where he stayed."

The unconscious sigh which ended the words told more to Carter than Sid realized. He remembered what close companions the two were, sharing books and games together, and he thought, with a pang of dismay, how he would feel if his mother and father were leaving him for so long. Neither he nor Sid had ever been away at school: they were still "home" boys. From that time he ceased to resent Sid's bragging, because he felt, dimly, that it was a prop to keep up the boy's own spirits.

On the day the Armstrongs sailed, Carter and his mother accompanied them to the pier. While the ladies were having a farewell chat together, the boys scoured the great liner from stem to stern. They asked for information several times, but every one seemed too busy to reply. Finally they cornered one of the officers and poured forth a perfect flood of questions. The officer looked at them quizzically, but answered the questions as fast as he could, until he was able to take advantage of a moment's pause.

"Any more questions, boys?" he asked seriously. "Best to get them all out of your systems before we start. You see I feel that I ought to take a little time to help run the boat, and I'd like to eat and sleep afterwards, if possible. Fire away!"

"We will," Carter assured him with a laugh, "because we'll be on the dock when you start."

"Not going? Really? Whew!" The officer whistled

in pretended relief. "And I've wasted all that breath because I'll probably have those same questions to answer all over again; we always carry walking question marks on each trip. I thought I saw my finish with you two on board, but there's hope for me now."

Just then the first warning sounded over the deck: "All ashore that's goin' ashore! All ashore that's goin' ashore!" and the boys rushed to the Armstrongs' stateroom. Carter bade them a hasty good-bye, and thoughtfully hurried out on deck, leaving Sid the last few minutes alone with his parents. When the final gong sounded, the two boys were the last to race down the gang-plank. As they joined Mrs. Carroll, Sid's eyes were averted and he kept strangely silent while the great liner was being towed out into the river. From the end of the pier they watched her steaming on her stately way past the huge docks of the various transatlantic and coast lines, past the Battery, and the Statue of Liberty, straight towards the outer bay and Sandy Hook. When they could no longer distinguish her from the rest of the craft in the bay, they turned away and started to walk up the long pier. Just then a leather-clad chauffeur touched Sid on the arm.

"Master Armstrong?" he asked inquiringly. He had seen him only once before.

"Yep!" Sid answered shortly.

He could not have said more if he had tried. Ever since he left the ship, his mother's loving good-bye and her last few words of counsel and advice had been ringing in his ears. A strange lump in his throat seemed

bent on choking him, but he conquered it by determined effort. Nevertheless, he did not resent Mrs. Carroll's motherly kiss, although boys of his age are not very keen on kissing, especially in public. He gripped Carter's hand hard as he turned away with a laconic "So long!" and entered the high-powered motor that was awaiting him, while the Carrolls hurried to South Ferry.

CHAPTER II

The Break Repaired

CARTER missed his friend during the next few weeks more than he could have believed possible. The two had been close companions for years. If it was sometimes, as they themselves expressed it, a case of "off again, on again, away again, Finnegan!" it was always "on again" after a short interval. As for the "S. I. G.'s," both individually and collectively, they felt Sid's loss keenly. All thought of challenging the "Stars" was put on the shelf until he could be with them again. There were other blocks on Staten Island and there were other boys on those blocks, but the eight felt that they could not fill Sid's place, and they would not if they could: they liked him too well. To a man they endorsed Johnny's opinion: "Sid 's all right, all right, and don't you forget it!"

During the three weeks following his mother's departure, Sid wrote to Mrs. Carroll twice in answer to kind, chatty letters from her. He told of riding lessons in the park, sight-seeing outings around the city, and motor trips to various places; but the only mention he made of his cousins was in answer to a direct question of Mrs. Carroll's.

"No, I don't know any fellows around here, yet. Guess there are n't any. Anyway, I could n't ask them

in here, because our people don't care much for boys. Cousin Mary and Cousin John are all right, only they 're awfully cranky and particular in their ways, not a bit like — " then the next few words were scratched out and these added: "but they try to be kind. We 're going to Newport soon. Guess I 'll like it there."

On the day school closed for the summer vacation, Mrs. Carroll was sitting in the library reading the morning paper, when there was a rush and a bang that fairly shook the house.

"I 'm thankful we don't live in a flat for the sake of the other flatters!" she thought, as she answered the loud, clear whistle with one equally loud and clear. This was the Carroll way of signalling.

An instant later Carter burst into the room like a young whirlwind, his arms so full that he might have been taken for a summer Santa Claus.

> "No more Latin, no more French,
> No more sitting on a hard school bench!"

he chanted gayly, as he let his strap of books fall to the floor and began to put down the articles he was carrying, with the greatest care.

"What are all these things?" his mother asked, surveying his burden in surprise.

"My work," he answered proudly; "things I made in shop this year."

Mrs. Carroll examined them with pleased interest. There were four pieces, a mission-finished tabouret, a whisk-broom holder, a plant stand, and a small table

rack for books. All of them were carefully made and well finished, as she saw at a glance.

"You 're to have your choice, mother," he assured her, adding in explanation: "You know I meant to give them all to you, but the 'S. I. G.'s' will need money for all sorts of things, so we 're going to have a sale and let people buy our work."

"Oh! I see!" Mrs. Carroll exclaimed thoughtfully. "In that case perhaps you 'd better keep them all for the sale."

"No, no, mother!" the boy insisted anxiously. "All the time I was working on them I was thinking how pleased you 'd be. We only have an hour and a half a week, in the shop, but don't you remember, I went to school for two hours every day during the Easter vacation? It was just to work on these things. That 's how I managed to finish so many. Some of the boys only have two or three small pieces, not anywhere 's near as nice as the tabouret. Can't you use that for your tea-table, — if you choose it, I mean?"

"Of course I 'll choose it," his mother answered promptly. "It 's beautiful, Carter, and I 'm proud of my boy. We 'll compromise the matter; we 'll put all the articles in the sale, only mark my table sold, and I 'll pay you whatever it ought to bring. I 'll know you made it for me, so it will mean just as much to me," she added tenderly. As she spoke, she arranged the things on the big couch, ready for Mr. Carroll's inspection later.

"I wonder why June always drags along so," Carter

complained, as he stooped to gather up his books which had slipped from their strap when he tossed them down. "It has only thirty days, but it always seems the longest month of all. July and August go fast enough! Shall I tell Minnie to put lunch on? I 'm almost starved."

"Poor boy!" His mother spoke gravely, but her eyes were dancing with mischief. "Can't you wait just —"

"If you knew how hungry I am," he interrupted unceremoniously, "you would n't ask me to wait a minute, even."

"Oh! all right! Tell Minnie to put it on right away. I can give you the present afterwards."

"Present? What present?"

"Never mind until after lunch. I know how hard it is to wait when any one is as hungry as you are."

"Oh, please!" he urged impatiently. "I — I can wait a little while longer. What is it, mother?"

"Guess!" she said, laughing at his change of base. "It 's something you 've wanted for a long time. I 'll give you three chances."

Carter looked about the library but discovered nothing unusual.

"It 's — it 's a — a new bicycle. I hope it 's got a coaster-brake! If it has n't it 's no good in a place like Staten Island."

"No-o-o!" drawled his mother tantalizingly.

"A cartridge pistol for the Fourth?"

"No, sir! I value my son too highly to get him that. Besides, this year no one will be allowed pistols, or fire-

crackers, either. It 's to be a 'sane' Fourth. Two chances gone!"

"But I can't think of anything else," Carter objected, "unless it 's a new racquet, or a football, or a canoe for the lakes, or — "

"Hold on, boy! That 's more than three guesses, and you 're not even warm."

"It is n't a garden set, is it?" he asked suspiciously. He thought it bad enough to have to keep the front lawn in order during vacation, without having the necessary implements classed as a "present."

Mrs. Carroll shook her head.

"Tell me something about it, won't you?" Hunger was forgotten in his interest in this unknown gift. "A fellow can't guess it without something to go on. Will I like it?"

"I 'm sure you will," was the emphatic reply. "Let me see; it 's smooth, and soft, and brown, and about two feet long altogether, I think. But you can't handle it just yet, because it 's being mended."

"Being mended? Humph! Some bargain! Why did n't you get a good one while you were about it?"

"Because I liked this one," his mother answered quietly.

"Where is it?"

"In the kitchen. Minnie has taken quite a fancy to it, so if you don't care for it, she 'll be glad to have it."

"Minnie? Now I know what it is! It 's — "

He dashed out to the kitchen without waiting to

finish his sentence. Mrs. Carroll found him kneeling on the floor smoothing and petting a small brown dog which lay on a denim-covered piazza pillow under the kitchen table.

"Just look, mother!" he said pityingly, as he saw the little animal shrink away from him. "He seems to be afraid of me, the poor thing! Why, I would n't hurt you, old fellow," he added to the dog; "not for a thousand dollars!"

"It 's no wonder he 's afraid," Mrs. Carroll answered, her face flushing with anger. "When I found him, he was being chased by a crowd of the roughest boys you ever saw; boys old enough to know better, too! He ran up to me and tried to hide in my skirts, and when I picked him up, his poor little heart was pounding dreadfully hard and he was trembling all over.

"I talked to the boys quietly for a few moments; I knew that scolding would do no good. I really think they were ashamed of themselves before I finished. One of them told me that the dog's owners had moved to a flat in the city, and had left him homeless. I don't see how people can be so cruel! The boy offered to carry him for me, but the dog clung to me in such a pitiful way, that I refused his offer."

"Where 's he being mended?" Carter asked anxiously, looking his present over with critical eyes, but failing to discover any blemish.

"One of his paws was hurt and he limped badly. That 's why I had to carry him home. I found it had a splinter in it, so I put on a bread and milk poultice to

draw it out. Minnie, why did you take the poultice off?"

"I did n't, ma'am!" Minnie defended herself promptly. "He ate it. That 's the second one he 's eaten."

"I bathed him the first thing," Mrs. Carroll went on. "He whined a bit — he does n't seem to be fond of the water — but I know he feels better now, don't you, old boy?"

The dog looked up at her with his beautiful brown eyes, and putting out his tongue tried to lick her hand, while his tail beat a grateful tattoo upon the pillow. He was not so sure of Carter; his recollections of the genus boy were not soothing; but he seemed to realize that in Mrs. Carroll, at least, he had found a friend.

From that day the newcomer became a regular member of the family. He proved to be an affectionate little animal, even though full of mischief and decidedly spunky with other dogs. The important matter of the christening caused much argument. The "S. I. G.'s" had not yet seen him, as Mrs. Carroll wished him to be kept quiet until his paw healed, but they sent in voluntary contributions in the choice of a name, ranging all the way from the much worn Jack, Rover, and Fido, to imposing cognomens like Julius Cæsar, Theodore Roosevelt, and Romeo, while Peanuts and Popcorn, Imp and Angel were suggested for the lighter variety.

After a day of indecision, Carter finally chose "Yankee Doodle," but changed it later in honor of his great-grandmother Carroll, a stanch Virginian, to "Dixie Doodle." The matter was settled by the purchase of a leather

collar with a silver name-plate, and "Dixie Doodle" he became officially, although Mr. Carroll usually called him "Dickums," Mrs. Carroll "Dickey Bird," and Carter, "Dix" or "Doodles," while the grocer, and butcher, at whom he rushed out and barked, referred to him slightingly as "that yellow mutt!"

When the boys saw him, they promptly adopted him as club mascot, which was fortunate for all concerned, because he at once adopted them. He liked to be on hand when anything was doing, and tagged the members persistently.

The family was at dinner a few nights later when Mr. Carter remarked suddenly: "By the way, I met an old friend to-day, mother. I asked him out over Sunday. Is it all right?"

"An old friend?" Mrs. Carroll repeated curiously. "Who, pray?"

But Mr. Carroll only chuckled aggravatingly and refused to answer until he and his wife were alone in their room.

"Now, tell me who 's coming," she demanded, with a determined light in her eyes.

"Guess I 'll have to, if that 's the way you feel about it," he replied teasingly. Then he went on in graver tones. "It 's Sid. He was down on Wall Street with his cousin, and came into my office to see me, so I asked him over. You don't mind, do you, dear?"

"Of course not," she assured him heartily; "only I 'm afraid the boy will notice the contrast after the Vandyne magnificence. He 'll probably find it dull here, now."

"He 'll notice the contrast all right," Mr. Carroll asserted positively, "but as to finding it dull, don't you believe it! He fairly jumped at the invitation."

The next morning at breakfast Mrs. Carroll told Carter who the expected visitor was. He received the news in silence.

"Don't you want him to come, Carter?" she asked anxiously. "Why, I thought you cared more for Sid than for any of the boys."

"I do," he replied slowly; "but he 'll be different, now, after having automobiles, and riding horses, and things like that. Those people are awfully rich. Why, they even have a footman back of your chair while you 're eating; really they do."

Mrs. Carroll burst out laughing.

"That 's easily managed," she said mockingly. "Won't a foot-woman do? I 'll tell Minnie to stand back of Sid's chair if you want me to. She 'll do it because she 's fond of him."

"Oh, you know what I mean," Carter answered crossly; he did not take a joke as well as he might, sometimes. "Sid 'll notice the difference, that 's all. He 'll think we 're slow."

But Sid did not seem to think anything of the kind, or if he did, he disguised it admirably. He arrived very promptly, Saturday morning. There were tears in his eyes as Mrs. Carroll greeted him in her motherly fashion, but he brushed them away hurriedly, and hoped that she had not noticed them. She had, though, and loved him all the more for them. At first the boy seemed un-

usually quiet and preoccupied, and not once did he refer to his cousins, or to his experiences since his mother's departure.

The "S. I. G.'s" gathered early, eager to see Sid again, and the day proved to be a jolly one. The boys found some bricks in the cellar, and begged a pail of plaster from the workmen at the new house on the corner. Then they worked away like beavers, making an oven in the garden. After it was plastered and the top of an old stove placed across it, it formed a first class camper's range. The work took most of the morning, but the result was so satisfactory that the boys hurried home, not to eat lunch, but to beg supplies and cook a meal for themselves.

Vacation days were young, and such requests had not yet been frequent enough to become annoying, so they returned from their quest with a varied assortment of materials, enough to stock a comfortable larder. Meanwhile Sid telephoned to the store and ordered fruit and fancy crackers as his contribution to the menu. After that the energetic young cooks were in their element and soon had ready an appetizing lunch of crisp bacon and eggs, roast corn and potatoes, with plenty of bread and butter. As they ate, each one was loud in praise of his own particular effort.

The wafers, fruit, and cocoa were to be the dessert, so the latter was put on to cook during the lunch. Just as Carter rose to lift it from the stove, Sid jumped to his feet in great excitement.

"What 's that?" he demanded, pointing to a thick column of smoke that rose over the bay.

"Tug, probably," Carter answered carelessly. "Some of them are regular smoke nuisances."

"Big fire somewhere, sure," Sid declared positively. "That 's an engine calling for more coal," he added, as a shrill whistle sounded over the Island.

"But it might be that thirty-second whistling buoy," Arthur objected. "You know — that new one off Robbins' Reef. They were trying it yesterday."

"Buoy nothing!" Carter answered decisively. "Guess we can tell a fire whistle when we hear it. It 's near the bay, somewhere. I wonder if the fire-boats will be there."

The mere mention of fire-boats was enough for the boys. Forgetting the necessary cleaning up after their feast, forgetting even the steaming cocoa which Carter had placed upon the improvised table, they dashed off in a body, in search of the fire. It proved to be at the cotton docks not far from the ferry-house. By the time they appeared on the scene, the place had become a dense mass of smoke through which great tongues of flame shot skyward at increasingly short intervals.

The boys gathered on the bank above — the police refused to allow any one to go nearer — and gazed entranced at the spectacle. The engines on the land side were pouring steady streams into the burning docks, but they seemed to have as little effect as the water from a boy's blow-pipe. From the bay, two of the fire-boats were playing great volumes of salt water into the

now solid mass of flame. At first, these also seemed futile against the powerful enemy, but finally the roaring tongues shot up less and less frequently; the blazing mass grew dull and blackened in places; the flames sank lower and lower until the great docks were one sullen, smoking mass of ruin, injured almost beyond repair.

So intent were the boys on the great fire panorama spread out before them, the contest between nature and art, that they did not notice that Dixie had followed them. The first thing they heard was a piercing yelp, followed by an angry "Woof! woof! woof!" from the dog, and furious curses from a man who went rolling over and over down the bank. He pulled himself together at the bottom, just as a policeman approached and ordered him to get out.

"I'm a gittin' !" he answered in surly tones. Looking up, he caught sight of Dixie, the innocent cause of his fall, peering down at him.

"Ye little beast!" he apostrophized him angrily. "Ye will git in my way, will ye? Jist wait 'til I git at ye!"

But Dixie did not wait. As the angry Irishman scrambled up the bank towards him, he turned and fled, while the crowd shouted with laughter at the man's mishap.

The boys learned afterwards that Dixie made straight for his drinking cup when he reached home, thirsty from his hurried exit. Finding it empty, he pranced about directly in Minnie's way, rushing from her to the sink and back again, until he succeeded in attracting her attention.

"Is it thirsty you are?" she asked at last. "Here, you imp, take it now, an' make yerself scarce!"

But when she tried to fill his dish, only a few drops of water trickled from the faucet. Hurrying into the laundry she met with the same result. As she hesitated, uncertain what to do about it, Mrs. Carroll herself appeared in the doorway, carrying a glass in her hand.

"There 's no water at all in the bathroom," she explained, "but I thought it would run down here. It's on account of the fire, I suppose. I wonder where it is?"

"At the cotton docks, ma'am."

Minnie always found out things because she had so many agents. She was popular with butcher and baker, milkman, ashman, and letter carrier, so of course she was always well informed.

"I wish the docks would advise us when they are going to burn," Mrs. Carroll complained smilingly; "then we could draw water in advance. This is the second time in two months they've shut off our pressure. Poor Dickey Bird! I'm afraid you'll have to wait until the engines leave. Hard lines, is n't it, old fellow?"

When the boys returned, thirsty and ready for their cocoa, they found the bucket so clean that they accused Minnie of washing it.

"An' how in the world could I wash it," Minnie demanded indignantly, "when there ain't any water in the house? I'd just like to know that!"

While she was speaking, Dixie appeared, and a tell-tale spot on his face caught Carter's eye.

"There's our cocoa!" he said resignedly.

"Where?" Johnny demanded, looking around innocently.

"Right there!" Carter pointed to the spot which Dixie had evidently not yet discovered. "I hope it was good, you rascal!"

After they went upstairs that night, the two boys engaged in some lively skirmishes, — first with water from their tooth brushes, then with their pillows. Even after Sid was ready for bed, he was challenged by a shower of baseball scores that went sailing mysteriously through the air above and around him. But they finally settled down and discussed "S. I. G." plans until Mr. Carroll's voice warned them of the hour. After that they talked in whispers for a time, whispers which grew gradually louder and louder, until for the second time poor Mr. Carroll was forced to go into the hall and remind them politely but firmly that even if they did not care to sleep, there might be others in the house who did.

"Don't see why they want to punish West Point cadets for that 'silence treatment' stunt of theirs," he grumbled, as he once more sought his own bed. "Guess the commandant don't know when he's well off!"

But Mrs. Carroll was interested neither in talk at home nor in silence at West Point: she was sound asleep.

Sid was to leave early Monday morning, so it was arranged for him to go over on the eight-thirty ferry with Mr. Carroll. Carter told him good-bye at the breakfast table, as he had to go to the store on an

errand for his mother. The two boys were genuinely fond of each other, but no one would have suspected it from their nonchalant words at parting.

"Come again, Sid," Carter urged politely.

"Thanks, I will," Sid responded, with equal politeness.

"So long!"

"So long!"

Then Sid, after a few low-toned words of thanks to Mrs. Carroll, for his visit, went upstairs to get his suit-case, while Mr. Carroll waited at the front door. Five minutes passed: no boy! Mr. Carroll fumed and fidgeted anxiously. He never allowed much of a margin for making his boat, and he remembered an important early engagement for that very morning. When five more minutes passed without results, he consulted his watch, snapping the case shut with visible anxiety as he wondered what was detaining the lad.

"He ought to have packed his grip last night," he muttered impatiently, pacing back and forth with uneasy strides. "Just like a boy! I could have been ready for Europe by this time."

Two minutes later he strode to the foot of the stairs.

"Sid! Sid! Hurry, boy; I must make the eight-forty-five! Too late for the eight-thirty now, I'm afraid!"

When she heard his voice, Mrs. Carroll appeared at the door of the dining-room, crumb pan and scraper in hand. It was laundry day, when Minnie had her hands full, and needed help with the table and dishes.

"What's the matter, dear?" she asked in surprise. "I thought you had gone long ago."

"See what's keeping that boy, Eve," he urged shortly. "Go hurry him up, can't you?"

"Hurry him down, you mean," she retorted laughingly, glad to get a "rise" out of him.

But she flew upstairs and disappeared into Carter's room. A moment later she reappeared.

"Go on! Don't wait!" she commanded briefly, in a whisper.

"But Sid?"

"He's not going," was the subdued reply, accompanied by several motions which were Greek to her husband.

"Not going? Why?"

"Oh, go on! Do!" she whispered urgently.

"But what —"

His question remained unfinished, because Mrs. Carroll had disappeared again. By this time he was genuinely anxious. Fearing an accident or sudden illness, he hurried upstairs two steps at a time, and stalked into the room, but stopped short in amazement. There was Sid, usually so self-controlled, crouched on the floor, his head buried in the bedclothes while great sobs shook the boyish frame from head to foot. Mrs. Carroll was bending over him, patting his shoulder and murmuring soothing words.

"Is he sick?" he whispered anxiously. "Shall I telephone for Dr. Howell?"

But Mrs. Carroll only motioned for him to leave the room, and followed him into the hall an instant later.

"Yes, he is sick," she said with tears in her eyes, "but he does n't need the doctor."

"Why —" Mr. Carroll began to remonstrate, but a gesture from his wife checked him.

"It's homesickness, poor lad! Just let him alone, dear. He's held in until he can't keep still any longer. It will do him good to give way."

"But are you sure it's just that?" he persisted in anxious tones.

"Quite sure," she answered positively. "And he's not going back to those people, let me tell you. He's going to stay with us. May he, dear?"

"Sure!" came the hearty response, as the two went into the room again. "Glad to have him. You understand that, my boy, don't you?" he added, smoothing the lad's ruffled hair gently as he spoke. His speech was gruff, even sharp at times, but he had the kindest heart in the world, as his wife and boy and his friends all knew.

"Then it's settled!" Mrs. Carroll said, with a relieved sigh. "I knew he was n't happy the instant I saw him, but I did n't realize it was as bad as it is. Will you see Mr. Vandyne and arrange the matter," she asked, following her husband into the hall, "or shall I? They must be pretty queer people not to appreciate a fine, manly boy like Sid. Cold as — as fishes, I think!"

"I'll telephone Vandyne right away," Mr. Carroll promised. "Good-bye, dear! I'm late. Good-bye, Sid! You're one of the family now, don't forget!"

"Thank you, sir," Sid murmured brokenly, his head still hidden in his arms.

It was not until Mr. Carroll had hurried down the

stairs and was sprinting nimbly towards the ferry, that the boy raised his head and shamefacedly tried to explain it all to Mrs. Carroll.

"It — it's so lonely over there! Oh! you don't know how lonely! I'm downright sick of handsome furniture and hangings, and servants tiptoeing about! And they never want a fellow to do anything unless he has a footman tagging after him like a nurse-girl!" Sid's tone grew contemptuous at the memory of his humiliation. "I tried to stand it for mother's sake, honestly I did, Mrs. Carroll. This don't look much like it, but I did. And I guess I'd have managed it all right if I had n't come over here where it's like — like home. I was all right when I came up after my grip, but all of a sudden I felt as though I could n't go back to that old dungeon after — after all this — this home part, and — and —" He broke off abruptly, then added anxiously: "Guess you and Mr. Carroll think I'm a regular cry-baby."

"Indeed we don't, Sid," came the comforting assurance. "There is n't a manlier boy on the block than the one I'm talking to right this minute."

"But — you said I could stay — only — perhaps mother will think I ought not to bother you." His tone showed the alarm he felt at the thought of any change of plan.

"We won't tell your mother anything about this," Mrs. Carroll relieved his anxiety promptly. "We'll say that we asked you to be company for Carter. You know we go to the lakes next month, and he'll be delighted to have a companion of his own age. Last year there were

plenty of boys there, but not one just right for him. I'm sure your mother will feel relieved to know that you are with us. Leave the explanation to me, Sid. She's away to get well and strong, and little things worry a person in her condition more than you realize. Mr. Carroll will explain to the Vandynes, and have them send over your things. I hope they'll be willing to let you come to us."

"Humph!" Sid said bitterly. "Need n't worry about that! They'll be tickled to death! I could n't help overhearing them once. They feel awfully sorry for people that are burdened with children, especially boys. I was a regular cross to them, I guess."

"Well, we'll think you're a crown for our summer's happiness," Mrs. Carroll replied brightly. "Now change that Sunday suit, young man. I'll give you this other closet for your things when they come. These extra clothes and the comforts can be put in one of the attic closets. You and Carter may carry them up by and by. Make yourself at home, won't you? I want you to feel settled until your mother comes back. There's Carter now."

"I — I don't want —" Sid began stammeringly, laying a detaining hand on her arm. She understood his fears and hastened to reassure him.

"I'll keep him downstairs until you are ready to come down," she arranged with great thoughtfulness, knowing that though the boy might give way before her to the great wave of homesickness that fairly overwhelmed him, he would brave it out to the last stroke

before the boys. "We'll simply tell him that I begged you to come to us instead of staying with the Vandynes, and that you have consented. He will be so glad to have his best friend with him he won't ask questions about it."

Fifteen minutes later as Carter was helping his mother arrange some flowers he had brought in from the garden, she surprised him by the announcement: "We've taken a boarder for the summer."

"A boarder? A boarder!" Carter's tone spoke volumes of distaste. "Why? Who? What do we want a boarder for, I'd like to know?"

"When? Where? What? How?" she mimicked teasingly. "Can't you ask a few more questions, Carter? I said, a boarder."

"You're joking."

"Indeed I'm not! And I'm especially glad of the arrangement on your account."

"Huh! You need n't bring in any old prig boarders for me!" Carter announced flatly. "I've got friends enough to —"

"Nevertheless, I think you'll enjoy this one. Sh! here he comes now!"

Carter looked up and saw his friend standing in the doorway — not the Sid in the immaculate pale gray suit, from whom he had parted less than an hour ago, but the Sid of the "S. I. G.'s," in his khaki clothes, ready for the day's fun. For an instant he stared at him in silence, while his mother wondered whether, in helping one boy, she had possibly failed to please another

as much as she had hoped. But the silence was caused by astonishment. An instant later, when he had had time to realize what the new arrangement meant to him, he sent the flowers he was holding flying into the air.

"Hurrah!" he cried out excitedly. "Three cheers for the new boarder! That's great! Come on, Sid, I hear some of the 'S. I. G.'s' now. Let's tell 'em what's happened."

The two dashed out, whistling shrilly to attract the attention of the boys while Mrs. Carroll smiled in a pleased fashion as she watched them go.

"It will do them both good!" she exclaimed softly.

CHAPTER III

The New Guns

On the following Thursday the postman handed Carter a card for himself and one for Sid among the bundle of letters and papers in the noon mail. Sid was spending the day and night with Johnny. He had received any number of invitations from the "S. I. G.'s"; they were all rejoiced to have him with them again. He was a handsome boy, dark-haired, with flashing black eyes. He was even-tempered, too, with a happy disposition, yet his friends knew that they could go just so far with him. The first attempt at imposition was usually the last, and they respected him all the more on this account. His return was welcomed by the mothers, too, not only because they were fond of gentle Mrs. Armstrong, but because they liked Sid himself so well.

The cards contained peremptory orders for the members of "Company H, U. B. B. A.," to report for "inspection" that night, as the major-general in command of the brigade in New York State was to be present. The cadets were urged to turn out in immaculate condition, guns polished, uniforms trim and clean, shoes shiny, and gloves snowy.

All of the "S. I. G.'s" belonged to the "United Boys' Brigade of America" — the "U. B. B.," as they called it. They were all enthusiastic over the drills, and never

let anything interfere with them. Their company, Company H, met in the chapel of the church each Thursday night, under the captaincy of one of the officers of the National Guard, Captain Truitt. The "Stars" also belonged to Company H, and a constant rivalry between the two nines ensued, as to which should be the most expert in the manual of arms.

There were several other companies on the Island, and on parade days, or at any public function at which the "U. B. B." was present, each company turned out in martial array, and vied with the others to present the most soldierly appearance. At such times the "Stars" and the "S. I. G.'s" forgot all private rivalries, and became simply members of Company H, with hearts set upon the same object, the glory of the company.

Carter read his card through a second time, then hurried upstairs to examine his uniform. There was an elaborate full-dress outfit prescribed for all the Brigade, but the service uniform for each company had been left to individual choice. Company H had decided upon a neat West Point gray, with black stripes down the trousers, and black braiding on the military jacket.

The new guns had arrived at the close of the previous week's drill, too late for use that night, but each cadet had been allowed to take his home to get it into good condition for the next drill. They were "the real article," as the boys exultingly informed every one who would listen; army rifles that had seen actual service but were a little out of date as to pattern, which had been purchased by special permission from the government itself.

Ever since the formation of the company the cadets had drilled with gun-shaped sticks, and Carter's spirits fell as he read the card and realized that the first drill with the regular guns would be the inspection. He regretted that they had not had at least one evening's practice beforehand.

When he reached his room the night the guns came, he found that the stock of the weapon had been heavily coated with vaseline as a protection against rust, so he spent almost an hour cleaning and polishing it until it shone brilliantly. It was after ten o'clock when a decisive command reached his ears.

"Go to bed, Carter!" Mr. Carroll ordered from the foot of the stairs. "Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir! In a minute!" came his favorite formula.

Exactly sixty minutes later, Mr. Carroll passed by his door and stopped in astonishment as he saw a crack of light shining beneath it.

"I do wish that boy would remember to put out the light," was his impatient thought, as he turned the knob of the door carefully, in order not to disturb the sleeper. But no such caution was needed: there sat Carter, still in full uniform, except for cap and gloves, so intently examining and polishing his new possession that he was entirely oblivious to his father's entrance.

"Do you know what time it is, sir?" Mrs. Carroll heard her husband ask in his sternest tones.

Carter jumped in surprise.

"N-no, sir!" he stammered hurriedly. "I was only waiting a minute to finish cleaning my gun."

"A minute!" his father repeated, consulting his watch as he spoke: "you ought to be with the 'minute man' at Concord! It's exactly twenty minutes after eleven!"

"After eleven!" Carter echoed blankly. "Why, I thought it was n't ten o'clock yet. Just see, father! Is n't it a dandy? This little thing is the sight, but I don't know what this is for, do you?"

Mr. Carroll sat down beside him to examine the part in question. Then he discovered a bit of metal that was still unpolished and proceeded to make it outshine Carter's efforts. After that the gun was cocked and uncocked, the bayonet put in and taken out, the weight tested and estimated.

"That's the only objection I have to the guns," Mr. Carroll said earnestly. "They're too heavy for you boys. Now a lighter rifle, or even a buckshot gun — "

"But, father," the boy reminded him proudly, "these are real army rifles. Why, this very gun may have been in some big battle. Just think of it! See this funny little dent! Looks as though it might have been made by a bullet, don't you think so?"

The two heads were bent in earnest scrutiny over the innocent looking dent when a deep, stern voice from the doorway made them both jump.

"Do you know what time it is, sir? It's exactly twenty minutes past twelve!" And there stood Mrs. Carroll, in kimona and slippers, watch in hand, laughing hard.

Both the culprits started involuntarily, then the older

one rose to his feet somewhat sheepishly, muttering excuses as he did so.

"Something Carter did n't understand, you know, so I — I tried to explain it, and — "

"I'll warrant there's nothing about that fascinating article you don't both understand now, though," came the teasing answer, as she calmly took possession of the gun and marched out, to guard against further delay.

All this had happened a week earlier, and Carter had not looked at his uniform since that night, but remembering the gun's liberal coating of vaseline which he had not discovered until he had "shouldered arms" and been through several manœuvres, he took it down with many misgivings. As he expected, the shoulder and upper part of the breast of the jacket were dark with grease.

He knew that there was no use asking his mother to help him in his difficulty. The neighborhood club met at the house that afternoon. It was quite a large club, so both Mrs. Carroll and Minnie had their hands full. Even as he came upstairs he had seen them working away in the kitchen, preparing the refreshments for the party. He had generously offered to crack the nuts and seed the raisins for them, and his offer had been promptly accepted on condition that he whistle all the time he worked. But somehow or other the condition seemed to rob the situation of its charm, and he had gone on upstairs.

He gazed at the mass of solid black which disfigured his jacket, in real despair. Ordinarily a heavy coating

of magnesia chalk would have absorbed the grease, and could have been easily brushed off before the drill. But he had forgotten to get another cake of magnesia, and he realized that not one but many applications would be necessary to remove such a soaking as his coat had received. He thought of gasolene. Many of the boys used it, he knew. He also knew that his father had distinctly forbidden its purchase for any purpose whatsoever. But then this was a special case: it was absolutely necessary. Of course he would be willing for this one time, if he only knew about it: of course he would.

So, quieting his uneasy conscience, he ransacked the pantry for an empty jar, had it filled at the oil store, and carefully shutting the door from the laundry into the hall, set to work. It was not long before the spot disappeared, and except for a darkened line where the cleaning operations ended, the uniform looked as new as ever, and he surveyed the result of his labor with great pride.

Hearing Minnie out in the hall, he pushed the jar with the rest of the gasolene, back on the shelf above the refrigerator. It tipped over in transit, and lost part of its contents, because he had been too anxious to get the evidences of his work out of sight, to screw on the lid properly. He hurriedly mopped up the little stream which trickled down from the refrigerator, trusting to evaporation to complete the process; then carefully tucking the oily rag into the middle of the ash-can where it could neither do damage nor tell tales, he went on his way rejoicing.

He had promised to be in at five that afternoon to help Minnie pass the refreshments, so at four forty-five he unwillingly tore himself away in the midst of an exciting set at the tennis courts, and started home.

"I'll take your place, Car," one of the boys called after him. "I'm A-1 at passing cake and stuff!"

"So am I!" "Count me in!" "I'm your man!" were the laughing offers that followed; but Carter declined them all and marched off sulkily, promising to be back as soon as possible to finish the set. He wished that Sid were there to help him: then it would have been play instead of work.

He slipped upstairs to his room to change his collar and tie, and entered the parlor just as the program ended and the ladies were standing about chatting and laughing. For the next ten minutes he was kept busy passing sandwiches and cakes, and trays of delicate glasses filled with jelly, covered with whipped cream and decorated with maraschino cherries. After all the guests were served, and Minnie was passing the coffee, he saw one of the ladies take a spoonful of the jelly, then turn with a wry face, and whisper to her neighbor.

"What on earth is the matter with it? Such a queer taste!"

"I don't know what it can be," was the subdued answer. "It's too much for me, though!"

Carter glanced about anxiously. He was standing just within the entrance to the pantry where he could see both rooms plainly without being seen himself. One after another in the dining-room essayed the jelly,

and one after another gave up in despair, yet in the parlor beyond the ladies were eating away with the greatest relish, more than one guest accepting a second glass.

"I wish you'd tell me how you make this jelly," Mrs. Boynton urged. "When I put nuts or white grapes in mine it never turns out well, but this is perfectly delicious. Thank you, Minnie, I believe I will," she ended laughingly as she proceeded to help herself to another glass from the tray offered by the delighted Minnie, while surprised glances and shrugs of astonishment passed between the occupants of the dining-room.

Just then Mrs. Carroll, who had been busy serving her guests, began to eat her own portion of the jelly. She took only one spoonful, however. Blushing uncomfortably, she hesitated for an instant, but finally said bravely:

"Mine is n't delicious! It tastes perfectly awful — like oil, or something of that sort. I'm so sorry. I don't understand it! Minnie!"

"Yes, 'm," Minnie replied, appearing promptly.

"Has the jelly been near any oil?"

"Oil? Oil? No, ma'am! We have n't any oil in the house except salad oil. The jelly was put on top of the ice chest till it got cold enough to go inside, an' there ain't no oil there."

Carter heard both question and answer with a sinking heart. A perfect hubbub of surmise and suggestions arose among the ladies, but he paid no attention. He grew first hot, then cold, as he realized what had caused the trouble. Glancing anxiously towards his mother, he saw that she was flushed with embarrassment; that

in spite of kindly urging from the sufferers in the afternoon's feast, "not to bother about it at all!" and even more kindly assurances from the lucky ones that they "had never tasted better jelly in their lives!" she was hurt and miserable over the occurrence. One more glance at her face settled the matter. Gritting his teeth to keep from following the impulse to run away, he stepped into the room.

"I guess I spilled some gasolene on the jelly," he said abruptly. It cost him an effort even to say that much.

"Gasolene?" his mother stared at him in amazement. "Why, where did you find gasolene? Your father does n't allow it in the house at all."

"I know," he explained, anxious to get the ordeal over; "but I bought some to clean my uniform. It tipped over when I was putting it away, but I did n't know that any of it went into the jelly," he added honestly, "or I'd have told you."

"Very well," Mrs. Carroll said quietly. "You may go out now, if you wish to."

"I rather think — " began Mrs. Walton's harsh voice, and he clenched his hands angrily, but before he reached the front door he heard Mrs. Boynton interrupt her unceremoniously.

"I'd be proud of him!" she finished the sentence quickly. "It was just an accident, and I call it downright brave to confess it frankly before a crowd of people like this. Not many boys would be manly enough to do it."

There was a murmur of assent at which he squared

his shoulders and really began to feel quite elated, but his mother's quiet reply brought him down again.

"The confession was all right, Mrs. Boynton," Mrs. Carroll said quietly, smiling gratefully at her boy's partisan; "but that does n't save the jelly. And you forget that having the gasolene at all after his father's express command was deliberate disobedience, and might have entailed disastrous consequences. I don't know what Mr. Carroll will say."

Carter was not left long in doubt as to his father's views on the subject. He received one of the sternest reproofs he had ever had in his life.

"Your mother and I want to trust our boy," his father ended. "If we make a rule we have a good reason for it, and we expect you to abide by it. Don't you know, son, that having gasolene, or any extremely inflammable substance in the house, might cost us all our furniture insurance, if the house should take fire? You know how poor the water pressure has been lately. How much chance do you think we would stand, here on the hill, in case of fire? I want you to think this over, and remember, neither your mother nor I make rules just for the pleasure of making them; we make them because they are necessary. You knew you were disobeying, did you not? Or did you forget?"

Carter hesitated an instant. He longed to say: "I forgot," but ended by answering truthfully.

"Very well! I suppose you know, too, that you completely spoiled your mother's refreshments after she had worked over them all morning?"

"I'm sorry!" he answered sulkily.

"It's a pity your sorrow did n't begin beforehand. If it were not that you told the truth about the matter this afternoon, I should have made your punishment more severe. As it is, you may go to your room at once, sir, and go to bed."

"Before dinner?" Carter faltered anxiously. He had had no lunch at all, and had been so upset by the jelly episode that he had not tasted the afternoon's refreshments, so by that time he was genuinely hungry. Unfortunately his father knew nothing of this.

"At once, sir!" he answered sternly.

"But to-night's inspection at the 'U. B. B.,'" he pleaded anxiously. "The major-general's to be there and — "

"Good-night!" his father interrupted decisively. Carter never disobeyed that tone.

The poor boy tossed and turned restlessly. It was a warm night, and through the opened windows he heard, presently, the whistle of passing cadets, but he sent back no answering signal. He was glad that Sid was at Johnny's: no one need know why he was absent from drill. He would pay the fine, rather than give a reason for his absence. He tried to drown his regret at missing the inspection by the thought that perhaps it would not amount to much. The boys were not used to their guns yet: they would be sure to make all sorts of mistakes! But it was not very comforting, after all, and his regret remained as keen as ever. As to his disobedience, he

was sorry, angry, and sorry again, by turns; but first and foremost he was hungry.

He tried to recall what they were to have for dinner that night. He could not remember the meat, but he thought it was to be beef steak, and he was quite sure of the tomato salad, and the peaches and chocolate cake for dessert. Before he realized it he had shed a few hot tears, a mingling of sorrow, regret, rebellion, and hunger; but he wiped the tell-tale moisture away instantly and tried to imagine that it was perspiration due to the warmth of the evening.

As he turned again, with a dismal groan of discomfort, he heard a light rap on his door.

"Who is it?" he demanded gruffly, sitting up in bed. It was bad enough to be punished like a "kid," he thought, without having people come to "rub it in" afterwards.

"It's mother, Car!" came the soft reply. "May I come in?"

"Sure!" was all he answered, but it contained volumes of eager welcome.

"I remembered that you did not come in to lunch, so I brought you something to eat," she said gently. "It's a long stretch from breakfast until to-morrow morning. Where were you at lunch time?"

"Practicing on the field," he answered, brightening visibly. "We'll be ready to play the 'Stars' pretty soon, but we've got to put in a lot of work and win, or they'll never stop crowing."

His mother had arranged his pillows while he was

talking, and placed a well filled tray on the swinging table at the side of his bed.

"There! it 's ready now! Do try to eat something," she said finally, as she set his soup before him, and began fixing his baked potato.

Try to eat! The mere odor of the good things made him fairly ravenous. He set to work with such good will that soon an array of empty dishes testified to his appetite and his thoroughness.

"I 'll have to pour something into these plates," his mother laughed, "or Minnie will think they are clean. Now good-night, my boy. Try to do as father wishes, next time," she added earnestly.

She had scarcely had time to get out of sight before another knock sounded on his door, and his father entered the room. Carter stared at him in amazement for he carried a bowl of soup in one hand, and a cup and saucer in the other, while the salt shaker, a small plate of butter, and a piece of bread were balanced on the edge of the saucer.

"Your mother says that you have had no lunch," Mr. Carroll began quietly, "so I brought you something. Whew! my arm 's all tangled up," he ended, laughingly, as he stretched the cramped member, after carefully depositing his burden on the table. "Could n't find a tray."

"Mother knows where they are. Or why did n't you ask Minnie?"

"Thought I would n't bother them," was the evasive reply. "I just brought up what I happened to find."

"Thank you, father," he said gratefully. Not for worlds would he have told him of his earlier dinner; he appreciated too fully his thoughtfulness under the circumstances. Instead, he made an effort to do justice to the food, and managed to eat a mouthful or two: but it was an effort, and his father left the room not a little worried over his boy's lack of appetite.

Once more Carter settled down, but this time as he thought of the love and care which surrounded him, he was filled with genuine regret for the ugly mood which had possessed him earlier in the evening. He was just dropping into an uneasy sleep when a third knock sounded, and Minnie's voice floated through the key-hole in a whisper almost loud enough to be heard across the bay.

"Hey, Car! Oh, Car! are y' asleep? It 's Minnie! I 've got somethin' for you. Will you come git it?"

"All right, Minnie," he answered drowsily.

"You poor thing!" was the girl's sympathetic comment. She had lived with the Carrolls for years and he was still the "kid" to her. But suddenly she remembered the jelly, and changed her tone. "Not but what you deserve to be punished, though! All that good jell, an' the raisins an' nuts an' things spoiled. An' just supposin' we 'd all been burned in our sleep some night! What then?"

"Then Jim would have to get another girl, Min," he retorted promptly, resenting her change of tone. "A grocery man 's got lots of chances. He sees all the pretty girls in town. It would n't take him long."

"Don't you believe it!" was all the answer he received to his taunt. "Anyhow, I could n't let you go hungry. See here! I 've scrambled you an egg on a bit of toast. You don't care for warmed-over dinner, an' I could n't git up any sooner. Git up now, do, an' try to eat somethin' afore you git one of your bad headaches."

And for the third time that night Carter tried to eat, but this time even his sense of gratitude failed to make him succeed in his effort, and Minnie was forced to carry the food down almost untouched. Such unusual lack of appetite worried her greatly. She spoke to Mr. Carroll about it when he passed by the kitchen window to put the hose away.

"I 'm afeard he 's sick, sir," she ended anxiously.

"I took him up some food too," Mr. Carroll was beginning, but Minnie interrupted him in relieved accents.

"Oh! that 's the reason! Then it 's all right."

"No, he scarcely ate anything! Just a mouthful or two. Perhaps I 'd better speak to his mother about it."

Mrs. Carroll was placidly finishing her book when her husband appeared before her, an anxious look upon his face, while Minnie, looking equally anxious, stood in the hall.

"I 'm afraid Carter is n't well," he began quietly.

"Not well?" She closed her book with a snap and was on her feet instantly. "I 'll go up to him right away. But what makes you think he 's sick? Has he got a 'temper'?"

"No, I don't think he has any fever. I did n't take his temperature though, but —"

"Then what makes you think he 's sick?" she persisted, as there rose before her the vision of a remarkably healthy-looking boy, eating a hearty dinner and talking away about "S. I. G." plans in the liveliest possible manner.

"Why — " her husband hesitated an instant, not liking to confess his weakness in giving in and taking Carter the dinner. "You see — I — you said —" he stammered nervously, "you said he had no lunch, so I took him up a bite. I thought I would n't bother you because you 're tired after your party, you know. But he did n't seem to have any appetite."

"An' he never ate a mouthful, hardly, of what I took up to 'im, neither," came in mournful accents from the doorway. "It was scrambled egg on toast, too, an' you know he always likes that, when he 's well, poor boy."

Mrs. Carroll looked from one disturbed face to the other, then, in spite of herself, burst into laughter, and laughed so hard that her eyes were full of tears.

"I 'll tell you what 's the matter with him," she said as soon as she was able to speak. "Poor boy! he 's stuffed, that 's all! I took him up a tremendous dinner: you see he 'd had no lunch," she added apologetically. "I must have been at the head of the procession, because he ate every scrap of it. Just think, three dinners! when he 's being punished, too! Talk about an only child! How he can help being spoiled I don't see."

"Neither do I!" sighed Mr. Carroll, dolefully; but he brightened up as he added gently: "unless he has a first-class, sensible little mother — like Carter's."

CHAPTER IV

A Raid and Its Results

CARTER learned the next morning that he had not missed inspection after all. Word had been received from the major-general, late in the afternoon, that he could not be with them, and that he had decided to postpone the inspection for two months in order to allow time for the company to become expert in handling the new guns. The message was greeted with whistles of relief from the cadets, a relief which was heartily endorsed by the captain. He had wondered all along why the formal inspection of a new company should be set for the first night the guns were in use, knowing that the company could not do itself justice under the circumstances; but, like a true soldier:

> "His not to reason why,
> His but to do or die."

So he had stifled his misgivings and gone on quietly with his preparations for the event.

For the following Thursday the cadets had arranged a representation of a camp-fire, with a competitive drill for the handsome medal offered by the Consistory of the church, and the galleries of the chapel were crowded with visitors long before seven-thirty. The room had

been transformed into a veritable camp. Several small tents had been put up along one side; guns were stacked near by; and the camp-fire itself — a red-covered lantern skilfully hidden in brush and branches — shed a realistic glow on the martial scene. Sentries tramped back and forth, challenging all comers. Awkward squads, the "rookies" as they were called, were vigorously drilled, and surely never were recruits more awkward. Groups of soldiers in undress uniform lounged at the tent flaps, singing songs and telling jokes. Later on a skirmish took place in which a spy, disguised as a farmer selling fruit, was detected, overwhelmed, and marched off a prisoner, while the wounded sentry was tenderly carried out on a stretcher formed by crossed guns.

It was such sport that the boys found it hard to "come back to earth," as Sid expressed it, even for the competitive drill. When the bugle sounded its brisk "Attention!" a most unusual absence of alacrity greeted its warning. Even this first chance to drill with the new guns, in the presence of visitors, too, did not compensate for the fascinating camp scene they were leaving.

When the notes of the "Assembly!" sounded, followed by the sergeant's prompt: "Attention, Company! Fall in!" Captain Truitt's keen eye noted this hesitancy, slight though it was, and after the usual prayer and Bible selection by the chaplain, he read them a short lecture on a soldier's duty. He had made it his rule from the start to let visitors in nowise interfere with the work of the company.

"It 's not all play, men," he ended earnestly. "And

it 's not simply wearing a uniform and holding one's self erect, physically. It 's keeping one's self erect and true morally and spiritually. That," pointing to the camp scene at the side, "may seem attractive, but it does not form a thousandth part of a soldier's life. He finds little time to lounge around camp-fires and sing comic songs. When not in the thick of a battle he is much more likely to be trying to clean up under difficulty, or working hard, on a stomach so empty that coffee, beans, and hard tack seem like far-off visions. That 's war, boys!"

The cadets listened attentively, hoping that the captain would go on and tell them some of his earlier experiences as a scout in a foreign war, but he had no time just then for personal reminiscences.

"You must remember," he went on impressively, "that this 'United Boys' Brigade of America' has been organized to make loyal soldiers under two flags!"

He paused, and the boys stared at him inquiringly. They had always thought that the "Stars and Stripes" was the flag to which they owed allegiance. The captain read their thoughts and answered them.

"As loyal citizens of the United States we serve under the 'Stars and Stripes,'" taking off his cap, and saluting the flag as he spoke; "but we also serve under the banner of Jesus Christ, as loyal Christian soldiers. Sergeant, call the roll!"

After roll-call various orders were read, then the competitive drill began. The lieutenant, an older boy

well versed in the manual of arms, having drilled with another company of the U. B. B., took command, while the captain, paper and pencil in hand, watched the ranks with an eagle eye. A few moments were allowed for practice, then the competition began, and the company was put through some stiff manœuvres. Each falling off in military precision, each slightest hesitancy in obeying the brisk commands correctly, was noted, and the cadets ordered to fall out.

The ranks narrowed to ten, to eight, to five, then to two, one of whom was Cooper, captain of the "Stars," the other, Sid! By this time the excitement was intense, and not only Captain Truitt, but also the audience and the losing contestants, formed themselves into a committee of judges, so that every motion of the rival cadets was noted. For a time it seemed as though two medals would have to be awarded, or the one cut in half. Each order was obeyed as by one man. The watchers scarcely dared to breathe, so fearful were they of missing some untoward motion.

"Parade rest!" the lieutenant ordered sharply. Then he mopped his forehead and turned towards the captain inquiringly. The captain nodded, and once more the rivals were executing some of the most difficult manœuvres, while the spectators, divided naturally, each for his own favorite, were hoping silently for some break on the part of the other cadet. Finally, when Captain Truitt was about to order another rest, Cooper suddenly bobbed his head nervously, to follow the motion of his gun, Sid meanwhile staring straight ahead with

soldierly erectness. It was a little thing, but it ended the contest.

"Private Armstrong wins the medal for efficiency!" the captain announced. "Private Cooper, honorable mention!"

He stepped up to them, with a few low-toned words, and gave each boyish hand a hearty grasp.

"I congratulate you both," he said earnestly. "With such drill work as we have had to-night we need have no fear of the inspection."

The rest of the company gave three rousing cheers for the winner, followed by an equally hearty round for the loser, while the rivals shook hands in the friendliest sort of way.

At the request of a majority of the company, Mrs. Harper had been chosen to award the medal, with Mrs. Carroll as second choice in case the invalid should be unable to be present. But she was there, and enjoyed both camp-fire and competitive drill thoroughly. A special seat had been arranged for her in the drill hall itself, as she was not strong enough to mount the stairs and join the rest of the guests in the galleries. At a signal from the captain she stepped forward, her gentle, girlish face aglow with pride in her friends, the boys. Her hands, which two years ago had been strong and brown, and had handled racquet and oar, golf clubs or bridle, with equal ease, were almost transparently white from the long illness which followed a severe fall from her horse. They trembled with eagerness as she pinned the handsome medal on Sid's left breast.

"I intend to write and tell your mother all about it," she whispered for his ear alone. "She 'll be proud of her boy's success."

Then to every one's astonishment, she turned to Cooper who, poor boy, had been shifting about uneasily, feeling his defeat with boyish keenness.

"It was a very close contest, and you did such fine work, that I cannot bear to have you go unrewarded," she explained, her clear, low tones audible all over the room. As the spoke she took a pin from the lace at her neck and fastened it upon his breast. It was a small American flag done in colored enamel, a beautiful piece of workmanship. The boy glanced from her face to his pin and back again to her, fairly beaming as he tried to thank her. She understood perfectly that his gratitude was even greater for her public appreciation than for the pin itself, handsome as it was. It was such acts of consideration as this that endeared her to the lads. As she walked slowly back to her seat she was followed by a burst of applause from both the company and the audience.

Immediately after the award of the medal and pin, the visitors took their departure. Once more the bugle sounded the "Assembly." This time the cadets fell in promptly and stood at attention while the captain spoke to them about the summer camp to which they had been looking forward ever since the company was formed.

"We are so recently organized," he explained, "that we have not, as yet, been able to procure a camping outfit. Neither does the surplus in our treasury —"

Here he stopped short, in spite of all his efforts at self-control, and joined in the hearty laugh which greeted his mention of the surplus. Strenuous demands had been made upon the treasury for various necessary articles, as well as for the refreshments for a social evening and an exhibition drill to which the friends of the company had been invited, so that, over and above the month's dues, the treasury surplus at that time was represented by the magnificent sum of one dollar and ninety cents.

"And the surplus in our treasury," the captain went on smilingly, "scarcely seems to warrant any expenditure at present; neither can we ask the Consistory of the church for more; they have been liberal enough as it is. Other companies, as you are probably aware, are already encamped on the hill near the fort, but Company H will have to forego the encampment for this year. By next summer we shall be prepared, and will try to make it a memorable holiday. It is simply a pleasure deferred."

He consulted his watch anxiously as he finished the announcement, and with the words: "Lieutenant, take command for the rest of the evening!" hurried from the room.

The ranks looked as black as thunder clouds while the captain was delivering the unwelcome news. They had talked and thought of the encampment for weeks, and even though they all knew the emptiness of their treasury, they had hoped, boy-like, that the treat would be arranged for them "somehow." Pleasures deferred

do not appeal to youthful minds; and when that pleasure means a "U. B. B. A." camp, under strict army regulations, it is not to be put aside lightly.

As the captain's erect, soldierly figure disappeared, a rumble of disappointment and criticism ran along the ranks. The cadets would not have dared to indulge in such a manifestation in his presence. He was a kindly, thoughtful, Christian man, and a lover of boys, but a good deal of a martinet in matters martial. He had had experience in military life both in South Africa and in America, and the company knew that it was fortunate in securing such a drill-master even though his duties sometimes called him away early, as on this occasion.

The lieutenant was thoroughly versed in military tactics, and conducted the drills with as much precision as the captain himself, but that night, as he saluted his superior officer and stepped forward to take command, he felt that the rest of the evening would not be plain sailing. That rumbling obligato meant reefs ahead! There was nothing of the coward about him, however, so he ignored the scowling countenances that confronted him, and began the closing drill by a series of sharp commands that were executed by the rank and file with more or less regularity, chiefly less. Even the new guns failed to soothe the rankling disappointment caused by the loss of their summer's camping.

Things went from bad to worse. There was no open infraction of rules, however; just a tantalizing slowness in executing orders, and an intangible atmosphere of insubordination. The climax was reached during the

final manœuver. As the squads wheeled about, one of the pivotmen broke step and began sneezing so violently that his cap flew off on to the floor. Another and another followed suit until it seemed that the cadets were trying to sneeze their heads off. At first the lieutenant looked suspicious, but a second glance assured him that whatever the cause, the results, at least, were involuntary. It was later than usual, and he knew that he could accomplish nothing as things then were, so he wisely decided not to try.

"Sergeant! Dismiss company!" he ordered, and the sergeant's sharp command: "Attention! Port arms! Open chambers! Close chambers! Dismissed!" was followed by a rush for the gun closet where the boys stored their weapons, the sneezing still sounding a vigorous accompaniment to their movements.

The lieutenant left at once, but the rest gathered in little groups on the pavement in front of the chapel, indignantly discussing their hard luck, and begrudging the happier fortune of the older companies.

"They've chosen the dandiest place for their camp," Carter exclaimed enthusiastically. "It's on that hill near the fort, overlooking the bay, and there's only one road leading up to it. It would be simply great for a siege: they could hold it against a whole regiment."

"Yes, and that's not enough for them, it seems," one of the other boys remarked gloomily. "I heard that they are all going off on one of the gunboats to-morrow. They got permission from Washington. One of the 'rubber-necks' is to take them out to the boat."

"Rubber-necks" was the name applied by the boys to the small cutters at the Battery, whose duty it is to carry the revenue officers to incoming steamers from foreign ports, as they enter the harbor, in order to receive their declarations of dutiable articles.

This bit of news swelled the general discontent to almost unbearable proportions. It was hard enough to miss a trip on one of the trim little cutters, but to miss the gunboat cruise besides seemed almost too much.

"Captain Truitt might have managed it some way or other," one of the "Stars" exclaimed angrily.

Instantly there arose a storm of assent and dissent; but loyalty to their captain conquered, and the critics soon found themselves in a hopeless minority.

"What do you think he is?" Sid demanded fiercely. "A mint? He can't make money. If we have n't it we have n't it, and that's all there is to it!"

"The other companies might ask us up at least for a day," Johnny complained in mild tones.

"They would if they had any sense," Carter answered sharply, as though that settled it, that the possession of sense by the lucky campers was not to be expected.

"Wish we could just see the camp, though," Johnny persisted plaintively.

"Gee! So do I!" came from more than one cadet.

"Look here!" It was one of the older boys who became spokesman. "Why can't we go up and examine the camp to-morrow while they're away? It won't do any harm, and we'll find out what we need for next year. Then we'd have one day in camp anyway."

This bold proposal met with dead silence for a moment, then followed a perfect buzz of argument for and against the daring plan.

"Too risky!" the objectors urged.

"No, it is n't. The camp'll be deserted!" came from those in favor of the plan.

"They'll leave guards, though! Of course they will!"

"No, sir! not with such a treat as that on hand!" The author of the scheme spoke with as much assurance as though he had personally superintended the arrangements for the campers' outing. "All the boys would kick to go: such a chance don't happen every day."

"Besides, they won't be expecting — er — visitors," Carter added, chuckling at the idea, "so they won't be as particular as they might be if they knew. The rest of you may do as you please, but this chicken goes to the 'U. B. B.' camp to-morrow, so there!"

This dashing decision lifted several doubters off the fence bodily.

"Count me in!" "Here too!" "I'm your man!" sounded on all sides, and the controversy ended by a party of eight cadets agreeing to meet at the foot of the hill near the encampment at ten sharp, the following morning.

On the way home the boys discussed the events of the evening, and Carter heartily congratulated Sid on his success in winning the medal. There was not the faintest touch of jealousy in his congratulations: he was too fond of him for that.

"But you stood up a good while, too, did n't you?" Sid asked.

"Yep! only five boys in line when I fell out. I dropped my gun too soon. I knew I'd do some silly stunt like that," he explained philosophically.

"Wonder who threw that snuff-powder," Sid said in disgusted tones. "It was a nasty trick, I think. Whoever it was would n't have dared to do it if Captain Truitt had been there."

"I have n't any use for that sort of thing," Carter answered, "nor for the boy who did it, either. He's a sneak. It reflects on the whole company, too, that's the worst of it."

"Why, do you know who it was?" Sid demanded in surprise.

"I'm pretty sure I do," was the hesitating reply.

"Then why did n't you say something about it?"

"I'd be likely too, now, would n't I?" Carter turned on his friend angrily. "What do you think I am, Sid Armstrong? A tattle-tale or a baby-calf? Just let me tell you right here and now —"

"Cut it out, Car!" Sid interrupted pacifically. "Of course you could n't give him away — I know that; but all the same it was a mean trick. I wonder what the captain will do about it?"

"Don't know! Court-martial, I guess!" Carter answered gloomily. "If he only strikes the right one the company will be the gainer by it, but he won't!"

"Perhaps the cadet will confess."

"Yes, and perhaps the moon 's made of green cheese,"

Carter retorted tauntingly, "but I'd have to see it — either the cheese or the confession — to believe it!"

The next morning promptly at the appointed time, not only the eight cadets who had agreed to the plan the night before were on hand at the appointed place, but also five new recruits, to whom the night had evidently not brought wise counsel.

"Good thing we're not superstitious," Sid commented lightly, as he counted the party. "Thirteen 's an unlucky number."

"Yes," Carter agreed promptly, "it is unlucky — for those who are not here! I expect to have the time of my life to-day!"

And before the day was over, his expectations were fully realized, though possibly not in just the way to which he referred.

They hung about the entrance to the hill road for some time, ready to dart into the woods near by in case of interruption, but seeing no evidences of the departure of the campers, finally concluded that they had made an early start for their day's outing. They knew that if strict military discipline was the rule of the camp, it would entail guards, so they crept up the hill with great stealth, darting from tree to tree, or from one sheltering clump of bushes to another. The road led its long, winding way through a lonesone stretch of wood, and they encountered no one in their slow ascent. At the top of the hill two of the boys acted as scouts by pre-arrangement, and crept forward until they were close to the tents. Everything was quiet as the grave. There were

no sentries, and the place was evidently deserted. The scouts hurried back to tell the good news to the others. Much to their surprise it was received with visible disappointment.

"Pshaw! too bad!" one of the raiders muttered impatiently. "Rushing the guards would have been half the fun. We could have tied them up in the tents while we enjoyed ourselves. They'd have had to toe the mark all right."

"Guess they'd be sorry they were living before we got through with them," another hazarded cheerfully.

By this time all caution was set aside. The boys were talking aloud as they tramped sturdily up to the encampment.

The site had been well chosen. It commanded a view of both the upper and the lower bays and the Narrows, and the panorama which spread itself before their eyes as they reached the brow of the hill, was fine enough to arrest the attention of any but mischief-loving lads bent upon an expedition like theirs.

A majestic ocean liner was steaming slowly past the Quarantine Station, its rails lined with incoming passengers, while the steerage deck was crowded with future Americans eager for a first glimpse of their new country. The red-stacked mail boat, a mere pigmy compared to the great steamer, had just pulled away from its towering neighbor, and was speeding up the bay with its freight of foreign mail. One of the barges of the Floating Hospital was being slowly tugged to its anchorage in the lower bay, bearing a pitiful burden of

sick babies to a day of pure air, good food, and medical care. Near the farther shore several excursion boats puffed along saucily, the music from their bands floating out on the clear air.

In the fort near by, a squad of soldiers was drilling; a little farther away two huge warships lay at anchor off Tompkinsville, their dark gray coats and tall steel fighting towers looking grim and warlike. A file of Jackies was lined up on one, ready for shore leave. Even as the boys watched, a puff of smoke came from the side of the largest of the monsters, followed by a deafening report. A similar puff and its attendant report from the opposite side of the boat announced the beginning of a salute.

"What's coming in, I wonder?" Sid asked curiously. "It's twenty-one guns for an admiral and thirteen for a commodore, is n't it? Say, don't that look like a foreign warship they're saluting? Or maybe another of the fleet 's coming in."

But the attitude of the rest of the boys said, more plainly than words themselves: "Don't know and don't care!" They could see the bay with its liners, mail-boats, tugs, and steamers, any day. Even warships with their deafening salutes had become an old story. Their time just then was to be devoted to more important, or at least more interesting, matters.

On closer inspection the camp proved to be quite an extensive affair. The tents were arranged to form a street which faced the harbor. In the center was a tall flag-staff from which a handsome flag floated jauntily

in the stiff ocean breeze from the lower bay. At the end of the street stood a larger tent, evidently the mess, as the opened flap of a small tent next to it displayed a stove and cooking utensils of various kinds. A camp kettle swung on a crane at the left. Everything was orderly, and the whole camp presented a trim, military appearance. And oh! how it appealed to its uninvited visitors! Their gay spirits were dashed with bitterness as a great wave of regret for all that they were missing surged over them.

"Here's where we become a committee of investigation," Johnny's voice broke the bitter silence. "This certainly looks good to me! Don't see why they wanted to leave, even for a gunboat trip. I would n't!"

"We'll lunch at the expense of Mr. Lucky-Men," one of the others added, making a dash for the nearest tent.

Such a thought had not occurred to them before: they had intended simply to examine the camp with a view to getting ideas for their own outing next year. But the feeling that they were being abused had taken such firm hold upon them that they greeted the suggestion to which they would not even have listened, earlier in the day, as though it were a matter of course.

"Whew! is n't this dandy!" Johnny exclaimed involuntarily, as he peered into one of the tents. "I see myself enjoying a siesta on yon restful couch," he added melodramatically.

"Oh! it's not bad, considering!" Sid commented grudgingly, but he refrained from explaining what he considered.

The thirteen examined the nearer tents thoroughly, and even though they longed to be critical, they were forced to acknowledge that there was no room for criticism — it was all, to their longing eyes, simply perfect.

"Come on!" one of the boys shouted, finally. "Double quick for the mess tent! Step lively, now!"

The rest responded with great promptitude, and they marched down the street towards the large tent, singing lustily:

"Soupy, soupy, soup, without a single bean!
Porky, porky, pork, without a strip of lean!
Coffee, coffee, coffee, the meanest ever seen!"

Just as they started in on "We Won't Go Home until Morning" a loud report rang out with startling unexpectedness, and the joyfully tuneful procession came to a halt with a suddenness that was wonderful to behold. Instantly the tents at the farther end of the street poured forth a swarm of cadets who surrounded the intruders with military precision, their guns pointing straight at them.

"Hands up!" the lieutenant in command ordered sharply.

Instinctively the boys obeyed. They knew, of course, that the rifles were loaded only with blank cartridges, if they contained any charge at all, but they realized that they were fairly cornered. The young officer in command looked stern and business-like, and the cadets surrounded them in overwhelming numbers. For an instant they stood motionless, in sheer dismay. Only for an instant, however: the next moment, as if with one

accord, they made a wild dash for liberty. It was a valiant attempt, but the ring back of them stood firm, a relentless barrier between them and the road. It was sheer waste of time, hemmed in as they were, and outnumbered at least ten to one. They realized this at last after several scrimmages with their captors, and submitted to the inevitable with what grace they could muster.

And the hours that followed needed grace; needed it in wholesale quantities. The faces of the raiders burned for weeks afterwards at the mere thought of the indignities to which they were forced to submit. But they were helpless, at the mercy of the very cadets to whose guards they themselves had promised scant mercy, earlier in the action. Neither wit nor wisdom availed to set them free.

The court-martial that convened immediately was undoubtedly intensely humorous to the victors, but to the victims it was humiliatingly serious. At its close they found themselves proven spies, and condemned to death, but due to the clemency of their captors the sentence was commuted to imprisonment at hard labor for the rest of the day.

How they worked, or were worked rather, after its adjournment! Their sentence was executed with more than martial vigor. They became hewers of wood and drawers of water. They were forced to fetch and carry, to brush off uniforms and polish shoes, to sweep out tents, even to blacken the stove, and wash and prepare the vegetables for the noonday meal. Later, as a crown-

ing indignity, they had the exquisite pleasure of waiting on the campers while they ate what to the hungry workers looked and smelled like a veritable feast of good things. And through it all their captors kept up a grave pretense of reality that would not have shamed a camp of regulars under similar conditions.

This was the hardest of all to bear — even jokes or jeers would have been easier to endure; but the unlucky thirteen were kept relentlessly at work until sundown, when, ravenous and raging, they were lined up before the entire camp that they had served so assiduously during the day. Then for the first time dignity relaxed, and a grinning mob enjoyed the roll-call in which the boys had to respond to the fictitious names they had given earlier in the day. The responses were somewhat mixed as several of the prisoners had forgotten what names they had chosen. Afterwards, amid jeers and groans, they were treated to a lengthy harangue on the conduct befitting officers and privates in the service of the "U. B. B. A."

"And you may thank your lucky stars, my men," the young officer ended patronizingly, "that you get off so easily. We might have shaved your pates and confiscated your clothes, you know. You are released on parole, now," he added loftily; "but see that you permit no repetition of this misdemeanor or it will be the guardhouse for yours! Corporal! serve the rations! We can't send even spies away hungry."

Whereupon a procession of cadets advanced, bearing tin plates on which reposed tiny portions of unbuttered

bread, and tin cups containing about one swallow of water.

"After you have enjoyed our hospitality my men will wait in the background while you take your departure," the officer assured them, with an unsoldierly grin; "but these," pointing to a pair of powerful field glasses that hung on a strap over his shoulder, "will keep guard on your movements as long as supervision is necessary. Ta ta! my friends! Come again, when you can't stay so long!"

With that he turned on his heel amid shouts of derision from the campers. The boys, goaded beyond endurance, sent the plates they were holding crashing to the ground. They longed to pitch them at their tormentors, but refrained: the memory of their day was too fresh and restraining. Then they hurried to shake the dust of the inhospitable camp off their feet.

"So that's how they knew we were coming!" Carter exclaimed suddenly, breaking the silence that had lasted from the top of the hill almost to the foot. "They must have been watching us from the start. That's how they had time to plan the ambush."

"Well, next year," Sid announced with grim decision, "we'll have field glasses when we go into camp if we have to do without bacon!"

No one thought of walking home, they were too stiff and sore from their long round of unaccustomed work; but before they boarded the car it was agreed to refrain from all mention of the day's occurrence. If any of the others asked about it, as they were pretty sure to do,

they were to be told that the thirteen had spent the day in the camp, and had been treated to rations before leaving, all of which was strictly true. As the camp "guests" left the car at their various corners, not one of them jumped off; each descended as slowly and carefully as "G. A. R." veterans might have done. Their one day's camping had left a lasting impression!

CHAPTER V

A Blot Removed

Mr. Carroll was late in reaching home that night. It seemed to the hungry boys that he would never come. Of course they might have eaten something beforehand, but they were too anxious to avoid embarrassing questions regarding their day's experiences, to take any unnecessary risks.

Carter had asked the blessing at each meal ever since he was old enough to speak plainly. When only a small boy he used to say the grace with his eyes wide open in order to keep tab on the actions of the family; and once he had stopped abruptly to inform a guest that her conduct was not what it should be. The lady was watching the folded hands and curly head of the small boy, instead of having her own head decorously bowed.

"Put your head down!" Carter had commanded in an earnest whisper. "I can't say it if you don't put your head down." The lady obeyed meekly but her shaking shoulders showed that she found it hard to put her mind as well as her head into a proper attitude.

When Mr. Carroll finally arrived and dinner was put on, Carter was so hungry that he raced through the blessing with much speed and little thought. As soon

as he finished, his father spoke to him very sternly on the subject.

"Don't you realize that you are asking God's blessing, my boy? If the words mean nothing to you, it is best to omit them altogether, or let either your mother or myself say grace in future. Now you may ask the blessing again, if you can say it in the proper spirit."

After that the two boys ate as though they had been marooned on a desert island without food of any kind. Minnie had made one of the stews of which both of them were so fond. The mere odor, as Mr. Carroll lifted the cover of the casserole, made their mouths water. An early breakfast, a hurried one, at that, and a day of hard, continuous labor, with no lunch at all, formed a combination that conduced to good appetite; but when their plates were passed over for a third helping, after the liberal portions which had gone before, Mr. Carroll raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"I'm delighted to see you enjoy the menu," he assured them teasingly; "but had n't we better return this casserole, mother, and use the wash boiler in future?"

"Don't tease them," Mrs. Carroll commanded smilingly. "Better buy meat than medicine! Besides, Minnie tells me that they were not in for lunch at all. I was in town all day, myself. Why did n't you come home, boys? Minnie had corn fritters all ready for you, and baked apples and cream. Where were you?"

"We — we were — too far away," Carter stammered confusedly, in answer to Sid's warning wink. "We could n't."

"But it is n't good for you to go all day without food," his mother persisted. "Why did n't you get something where you were?"

"We were not near anything — that is — " he stopped short, realizing that he was not adhering strictly to the truth. They had been near enough, — that was not the trouble. An embarrassing pause ensued, which Sid finally ended by a diplomatic explanation which failed to explain.

"We could n't come home, you know, and we were n't where we could get at any food."

"Except some bread," Carter added, at which they both smiled involuntarily.

And after all, Company H found that it was not being as deeply defrauded as it had imagined. Only four companies were in camp, and those four were the oldest ones, both from the point of organization and of the ages of the members. They also learned that the gunboat trip upon which the thirteen had banked was scheduled for the same day the following week. The little mistake in the date had been an expensive one for them.

"Shall we try it again?" Johnny asked intrepidly, when the boy who had made the mistake apologized for it. "They probably won't expect us next week."

"Oh! forget it!" came the reply, as in one voice.

But though the culprits were willing enough to "forget it," they soon found that they were not to be allowed to do so. The account of the attempted raid had spread like wild-fire through some mysterious agency, not

through any betrayal on the part of the boys themselves. The whole thirteen had been, to a man, clam-like in regard to the entire episode. They had to endure a regular fusillade of taunts and jests at their expense. For the next few days they found it as difficult to elude their tormentors as they had to elude their captors at the camp.

They were all anxious to cut the "U. B. B." on the following Thursday, but absence would look cowardly besides entailing embarrassing explanations in the home circle. And after all, it would only postpone the evil day a week longer, so they appeared as usual. The drill progressed finely. The orders had been read, and the raiders were just beginning to breathe freely with the feeling that they were safely "out of the woods," when the bomb burst.

"I have received advices from Camp Lookout," the captain began suddenly, "telling me of a raid upon the camp and the supplies — an attempted raid, I should say. The perpetrators gave assumed names when they were captured, but several of them were recognized as members of Company H. I cannot adequately express to you the deep chagrin with which I learned the details of this affair. The captain commanding the camp threatened public court-martial at first, but was finally convinced that the invading party meant only to play a joke and not to destroy camp property.

"I fully intended to have the guilty ones court-martialed here in our own company," the captain went on, "but when I learned the result of the invasion, I — "

The grave reproof with which he began his arraign-

ment had gradually relaxed until, at this point, he stopped short, unable to conceal his amusement. An instant later he went on more sternly, although his eyes were twinkling with mischief.

"As I was saying, when I learned the result of the invasion I decided that the culprits had paid pretty dearly for their joke. In future they will think twice, I feel sure, before they attempt to break down military discipline, even in a 'U. B. B. A.' camp."

A shout of derisive laughter greeted the close of the captain's remarks. Some of the company who had heard of the affair without learning the names of the cadets concerned in it, looked from one to another inquiringly, while the guilty thirteen swallowed hard in their efforts at self-control, and stared at the floor so fixedly that they knew every crack in it by heart. They all felt, however, that the captain was dealing most leniently with them.

"And now for a matter that concerns this company much more closely," the captain went on in grave tones. "I refer to the act of insubordination of last week, the sprinkling of the snuff, or whatever it was, on the floor. It was a disgraceful affair, unbecoming a soldier and a gentleman. As it is a first offense, the private or privates concerned may report to me at the close of the drill to-night."

There was dead silence in the room.

"I will not ask for information which may lead to the detection of the guilty ones, should they fail to appear before me, because I know that you would refuse to give

it, and rightly, too. I don't care to turn my company into a band of detectives, even to settle so grave a breach of discipline as that of last week. But I warn you, — " he paused impressively while every eye was fixed intently upon him, "I warn you that this matter will be sifted to the bottom; that, in case of failure to confess and clear the innocent ones, the culprits, when discovered, need expect no mercy. It is a blot upon the company's good record, and unless the mystery is finally cleared up, Company H will be dismissed for an indefinite period."

For an instant not a movement broke the silence of the room. The boyish faces looked troubled. Not to have their beloved drill nights! Not to wear their uniforms, and march proudly past the less fortunate fellows on parade days, with a "Lo! the conquering hero comes" air! They realized, suddenly, how much the "U. B. B." had come to mean to them even in so short a time, over and above the outward show, and shifted uneasily, each hoping that the other, whoever he was, would be man enough to "face the music," and by speaking up clear the good name of the company. The uncomfortable pause which followed was broken in a most unexpected manner.

"I did it!"

The boys fairly jumped as they saw Johnny Porter step forward and salute his superior officer and knew that he must have been the speaker. He was a delicate, fair-haired, blue-eyed boy, very manly in spite of his somewhat effeminate appearance. All the boys respected as well as liked him. He was one of the youngest cadets

in the company but nevertheless he was fully up in the manual of arms, and could compete with any of them in the correctness and precision of his drill.

An involuntary "Oh!" from the company greeted his confession.

"Not YOU, Porter!" the captain exclaimed emphatically. "I cannot believe that you would do such a thing!"

His unbounded astonishment was an unconscious compliment to the boy, and the rest appreciated it.

"I did n't!" came the contradictory statement. "I — I — my pocket did it!"

The earnestness of the answer was so intense that not a boy smiled.

"It had a big hole in it," Johnny went on bravely, "and I did n't know it."

"But what were you doing with snuff powder, my boy?"

"It was n't snuff powder," the lad asserted positively. "It — it was — "

"Well?"

"Cayenne pepper!" the boy blurted out. "I bought it at the store before I came to the drill."

"Do you think that cayenne pepper is the proper thing to bring here?" Captain Truitt demanded sternly. He was disappointed and hurt that Johnny Porter, one of the best boys in the whole company, should fall so far short of his expectations.

"But I did n't bring it here! I — I mean I did n't purposely!" Johnny stammered in his eagerness to exonerate himself. "I had to go to the store for it be-

fore the drill, but I forgot to take it home again, because I thought we were late, and I wanted to see the campfire and — I guess the bag must have bust — broken, I mean, when we were tackling that spy."

The explanation was given with such comical seriousness that the boys fairly shouted with laughter in which, after a moment's hesitation, both the captain and Johnny joined heartily. Their mirth, however, was one part amusement at Johnny's expense, and one part relief on their own account. They felt that the cloud which had hung over their beloved company had suddenly lifted. No more talk of disbanding or dismissal for an indefinite period! Johnny's frank confession had dissipated all such danger.

That ended the incident, and the evening which had promised to terminate so disastrously closed, instead, with one of the finest drills the company had ever given. Each member felt a glow of renewed allegiance, not only to his own company but to the whole organization. They all trooped out, after putting away their guns, chanting the touching little "pome":

"Rah! Rah! Rah! Sis! Boom! Bah!
Cayenne pepper! Rah! Rah! Rah!"

It was not a noiseless performance, and one or two passersby, people who did not understand that "boys" and "noise" rhyme perfectly, shuddered as they listened. They did not understand either, that the vigorous Rah! Rah! Rahs! were escaping steam which saved the boilers from "busting!" as Johnny would have expressed it.

CHAPTER VI

The Club's New Headquarters

CARTER'S regular allowance was twenty-five cents a week. He was supposed to earn it by doing what he was asked to do in the way of errands or small tasks about the house, promptly and willingly. Sometimes he really did earn it, but not always. When spring opened, however, and the grass needed constant attention, Mr. Carroll agreed to give him fifty cents a week on condition that the lawn was never allowed to become ragged or unkempt.

" 'Shaven and shorn' is as good a description for grass as it is for men," his father told him. "See that ours fits that description, my boy."

Carter proved pretty faithful in his outdoor work. In addition, he was doing all the errands for his mother and Minnie with lamb-like willingness, because he wanted to earn enough to buy a tent. By the first of July he had saved a sum sufficient to purchase a small one; but it was to be a "sane Fourth" on the Island that year, with no fireworks except those set off by authorized clubs and organizations, so Mr. Carroll offered to add the money that usually went up in smoke to the tent fund, and get a good-sized one while they were about it. Carter accepted this offer joyfully.

The day the tent was expected the Carroll garden was black with boys. Not only the "S. I. G.'s" turned out in force, but friends and friends' friends accompanied them; for by that time the fame of the expected arrival had spread. Likewise the size of the tent had increased, until it bade fair to rival Barnum's show-tent itself.

Carter rang up the express office several times, that morning, and when he was informed finally that a large package addressed to Mr. Lindsay C. Carroll had arrived, the "S. I. G.'s" mounted their wheels and hurried to the office at the ferry. But their haste availed them not at all. The package was too bulky for them to manage, and the express driver stubbornly refused to alter his route to suit their impatience.

"I've got a load of trunks and heavy things this morning," he explained, "an' I can't go up to the Avenue 'til I git there. Now put that in yer pipes an' smoke it!"

So the boys were forced to wait with what patience they could muster, until their turn came. They accompanied the wagon on its round, however, forming a squad of out-riders that both badgered and assisted the driver. At each stop the man simply had to indicate the parcel and the house. It was a case of "touching the button": the boys did the rest. On the other hand, the poor fellow was questioned so often that he confessed himself more tired at the end of his trip than on days when he performed his deliveries unaided. Before they reached the "S. I. G." block he struck, and became absolutely mute, either nodding, shrugging his shoulders, or ignoring the questioners altogether.

It proved to be a very large tent, even larger than they had hoped. The rest of the day was devoted to getting it up, and arranging the interior. The boys found it so fascinating, when completed, that several of them volunteered to stay all night and sleep in it, but Mrs. Carroll politely declined their offers.

"It won't run away, boys," she assured them smilingly; "and if any one tries to steal it we'll surely hear them."

The next day they decided to inaugurate their new club headquarters by giving a show, feeling that the tent itself would prove a strong drawing card. They set to work with a will and decorated it with all the flags, banners, and pennants they could obtain, then hung long streamers of red, white, and blue paper from the fence and the clothes posts. A balloon man happened to pass while they were at work, and Mrs. Carroll donated towards the decorations, four bright red balloons. These added a finishing touch, as they tugged away at their fastenings on the top of the tent. Some highly colored circus posters, showing performing elephants, trapeze actors, bareback riders, and a diving horse, one and all in the act of doing impossible feats, were hung on the sides of the tent, and on the fence to give the correct circus touch to the picture.

When all was finished the boys drove stakes in the ground some distance in front of the tent, and stretched a rope across, so that no one but the "S. I. G.'s" themselves could get in. Then they held a business meeting to discuss the price of admission.

"Let 's charge two cents," Johnny suggested mildly. "It 's beach season, and money goes so fast!"

"Not on your life!" Carter answered decisively. "It 's beach season for us, too! Besides, we 're putting lots of energy and time into this show. We 're going to make it a real circus, before we get through with it. I say, ask ten cents! We need the money to buy a flag for the pole in front of the tent. What 's a tent without a flag, I 'd like to know! Those flags are borrowed and have to go back by six o'clock. I promised positively."

"We really do need a flag," Johnny commented thoughtfully. "If any of us should die, we 'd have to have something to put at half-mast. We might have use for it all of a sudden, too!"

"That 's so," assented Arthur, in at the start for once. "That time I had appendicitis — you know, when I ate too many cherries — it began just like *that!*" He snapped his fingers to illustrate the speed with which his malady had come upon him. "But I can't have it again, that 's one thing sure, because I have n't any appendix now. Do you know, the doctor said that my case —"

"Yep! We know! Never was such a com-pli-cated one before!" Carter interrupted mockingly. "We 're up to circus now, Art. You can put your appendix in as one of the side-shows, though, if you want to. Which is it to be — two, five, or ten?"

After much discussion the admission was fixed at five cents, a sum likely to come within the means of all. This was for those who were privileged to sit inside

the tent; the less fortunate ones who would be obliged to sit on the grass near the tent flap were to pay only three cents. An advertisement to that effect had scarcely been tacked up on the front fence, before a note was passed over the line. It was from Chester Carpenter, one of the younger boys, and was written on a piece of manila paper, evidently torn from a bag, but it meant business, just the same. It was addressed to Carter.

"I just bought a bag of gum-drops so I can't get another nickel, or three cents either, today. Don't you remember the time I picked all those burrs off Dixie Doodle? They were stuck in awful tight. Can't I come in free if I try to get all the boys I can think of to come? I 'll give you my gum-drops, too. I only ate one."

Carter read the note to the rest of the boys, and the committee decided that the case called for leniency. Besides, they all liked gum-drops.

"Come over here, Ches," Carter called to the anxious watcher beyond the line. "It 's all right, but I guess we 'd better take the gum-drops now; you might forget to bring them this afternoon. We 'd rather have the money, you know. Now that we 're a regular club we 'll have to have a treasury. But it don't matter this once."

"Here they are," Chester responded promptly. "I 'll tell all the boys I can."

He handed over the bag as he spoke, but just then some one happened to jerk the rope against it and it crashed to the ground, sending its contents flying out

on to the grass. Quick as a flash Dixie Doodle flew after them, and before Carter could reach him, had taken possession of two large ones, which be began chewing with evident enjoyment. A moment later he was dancing about wildly.

"What 's the matter with Dix?" Sid inquired anxiously. "Think he 's going to have a fit?"

"Fit nothing!" Carter answered. "He 's got the gumdrops he hooked stuck in his back teeth, that 's all. Whew! Just see that!"

Dixie was dancing a lively jig on his hind legs, his front paws being in use at the time as toothpicks. The boys laughed aloud, the small dog looked so comical, but suddenly Carter jerked him into the tent.

"That 'll do for one of the acts," he explained eagerly. "We 'll call him the 'Dancing Dervish Dog'!"

This reminded the boys that while tent, decorations, and admission had all been settled, the show itself, with the exception of this one act, was still unprovided, and a whole menagerie had to be captured before two o'clock; so they went into executive session within the tent while a corps of unsolicited advisers hung along the rope, and offered suggestions that were more or less feasible.

The number of performers that had volunteered would have done credit to the Hippodrome caste itself. But outside talent had been refused: it was to be an "S. I. G." show. All the members were willing to take part: too willing in fact; and Carter, as manager, had hard work settling the disputes that ensued. Five of the boys struck because each wanted to be the clown, and during

the practice, later, when Carter used his long riding whip a little too freely, a sixth member of the company joined the strikers. This was Dixie Doodle. He retired to sulk it out beneath the front piazza. The space was too small to admit even a small boy, so he was out of reach. It was only after much coaxing and a bit of persuasion in the way of some soup meat begged for the purpose, from Minnie, that the dancing dog consented to declare his part of the strike off. The other strikers were already arbitrating.

The whip which caused the mischief had been loaned by Jim, the grocery-man. Dressed in his father's velvet smoking jacket, high rubber boots, and carrying the whip, Carter felt that his appearance as ring-master left nothing to be desired. After all, it was not his appearance, but his actions, to which the striking dancer objected. That business-like snap of the whip's long lash sounded better than it felt as it curled about his slender legs.

"Never mind, old fellow," his master coaxed, holding the meat as close to the dog as he could reach. "Come on and play ball, boy! I won't use the old whip again, honestly I won't! Come on, now!" And Dixie came, while the other strikers compromised by arranging for five clowns.

The menagerie presented many difficulties. The stuffed wild-cat, the chipmunk, the beaver, and one or two birds that belonged to the school museum, and were being stored in mothballs in the Carroll attic, were secured on condition that they would be handled with

care, and returned to their storage as soon as the show was over. A great moosehead with splendid antlers was cunningly arranged under a tepee of table covers, the head alone showing at the entrance. A little imagination easily added the rest of the body.

Mrs. Harper donated her great striped cat for the tiger. The cat's name was Fairy, and a very substantial fairy she looked. The lady also lent her cage of canaries, and her poll-parrot on its stand, while Arthur Boynton carried over his collection of turtles, frogs, and lizards, and Carter brought out his mice, one pure white and one pale tan in color. Johnny contributed his guinea pigs. They were put in an enclosure at the back of the tent, in which the boys arranged little mounds of earth with a hole in each mound, to represent a prairie dog village. Mrs. Porter called up and generously offered to present the guinea pigs to the "S. I. G.'s." Mrs. Carroll refused the gift politely, but firmly, offering instead to send Carter's two mice over to Porter's if the lady wished to have them for Johnny's amusement.

Altogether the collection made a pretty good menagerie, but the boys felt the need of more large animals. They were racking their brains in the effort to think of something else, when Mrs. Harper called Carter over and talked to him from the window. A moment later he whistled for Dixie and the two disappeared into the house.

Mrs. Harper had been watching the circus preparations all morning. It was one of her bad days when she was unable to walk at all, but she seemed to enjoy

the fun in spite of her pain. Her boy would have been just Carter's age, had he lived, and in all the boys' frolics she seemed to see her own dear lad. She had come to feel that anything she did for their pleasure was also for his.

When she learned of their difficulty a bright idea occurred to her. She sent her maid up to the attic for an old, fur-lined driving-coat of Mr. Harper's. Ripping out the lining she fashioned from it a big, shaggy, fur coat which she pinned about Dixie's neck and beneath his body, with large safety pins, so that when Carter rejoined the circus troupe, Dixie Doodle had disappeared and a shaggy-looking lion had taken his place. It was a pretty hot day to play lion, but the small dog did not seem to object.

Arthur Boynton was the only one who had been to the circus that spring, as it happened, and all the time the preparations were going on he kept up a grumbling obligato that was simply maddening to the rest.

"That is n't the way Barnum does it!" "They don't do that in the real circus!" "I 'll show you how to fix it!" greeted every move until the boys grew tired of hearing him, and told him frankly that if he would let Barnum manage his circus they felt quite capable of managing theirs.

"Look here, you old growler!" Carter burst forth at last, all patience exhausted; "if you don't like the way this show 's being managed you can take your turtles and go home."

But Arthur preferred to stay, so he wisely kept his criticisms to himself.

Fortune favored the boys that afternoon. Just before the time for the opening of the circus, Paula, the organ grinder came along. He was a little, wrinkled old man, and his monkey was little, wrinkled, and old, too. Mr. Carroll prophesied that some day they would both get so dried up that they would blow away. The monkey's name was Peek-a-Boo, and the old man petted it like a baby.

Paula was one of Mrs. Carroll's "prize-packages," as her husband teasingly termed her protégés. She felt sorry for the poor old fellow and often treated him to a good meal. In return he kept for their house the wheeziest tunes in his whole repertory, tunes that were composed on the Ark and had been in active service ever since, at least so Mr. Carroll insisted.

On the day of the circus she offered him a quarter if he would lend Peek-a-Boo and the organ to the boys, while he rested and ate his lunch.

"Not hurta da babee?" Paula inquired anxiously, patting the ugly little head with loving touch, while the "babee" crept closer into his arms and surveyed the crowd of boys with his bright little eyes.

"No, indeed!" Carter assured him. "We would n't hurt the little fellow for the world!"

That seemed to satisfy the old man, especially as he saw that Peek-a-Boo, after being fed, willingly accompanied the boys, leaving his master to dispose of the lunch which Minnie spread before him. "I taka da

eats!" the old fellow remarked complacently, "I lika da lady, too!"

Later he told Minnie that the Carrolls' was the only place he ever got a square meal. Minnie was not quite sure what a square meal was, but she would not confess it.

CHAPTER VII

The "S. I. G.'s" Show

PROMPTLY at two o'clock Carter brought out his big drum, mounted a soap box near the front gate and played a tattoo with might and main "to draw the crowd." It seemed to Mrs. Carroll that the crowd was already drawn, as both sidewalk and street were filled with boys. Many of them had camped out on the curb since early morning, generously giving advice and suggestions whenever opportunity offered.

"Ladies and Gentlemen!" Carter began in stentorian tones when his mother opened the window and motioned for the drumming to cease. "Come one! Come all! and see the greatest circus in the world. Anyhow, it 's the greatest on Staten Island. See the marvellous aggregation of animals! See the rare birds, the prairie dog village, the carnivora and the omnivora! Within awaits the rabid tiger and the ferocious man-eating lion from the jungle —"

Just at this point Dixie espied one of his special friends among the crowd at the gate, and forgetting his untamable wildness, he advanced with tail wagging in friendly fashion.

"Hey, there, you fellows!" Carter shouted fiercely; "can't you keep him inside? What 's the use of giving

a show if they see it all beforehand. Get back there, Dix! Go on!" Then he went on with his business as a barker.

"You may behold the Dancing Dervish Dog, the Trick Bicycle Rider, the Roller Skate Expert, and the Balancing Pole Act. See the intrepid Bareback Rider, and the Educated Monkey captured in the wilds of — of — well, captured, anyway. All these attractions under one huge canvas, and for the insignificant sum of one nickel; just five cents, ladies and gentlemen! Think of it! The Grand March alone is worth the price of admission!"

But after all, the show was not under one canvas: it was not under any canvas at all; because the boys soon found that the tent would not hold all the audience, to say nothing of the actors and the menagerie. So the latter were placed in quarters near the side fence, while the acts were performed on the grass in front of the tent. No one was sorry for the change, however, because it permitted Mrs. Harper to see everything, and also gave that privilege to a crowd of poor youngsters from the back street who had hung about, penniless, but eager, all morning. Besides, it was hardly fair to expect boys to sit outside when they had paid good money to sit in a tent: it would be asking too much.

There was some delay at first, because all the actors wanted to grind the organ and show off the monkey's tricks, but Carter settled the difficulty by sending Sid in for the kitchen clock. Minnie was chatting away with old Paula, and did not notice what he was after,

"The lion had to lead the march alone, with Ring Master Carroll holding his chain." *Page* 93.

or there would have been trouble. But when the clock was put in a conspicuous place on the fence, each member was allowed to take charge of the "band" for five minutes. There was not the slightest chance of any one securing overtime, because the conductor whose turn came next usually tagged after the musician during the last minute, to be on hand promptly.

The Grand March was not altogether a success. The lion and the tiger were to head the procession. Fairy, the cat, knew Dixie well and was always friendly with him, but she was not acquainted with the great shaggy creature that advanced towards her that day, and, moreover, she refused to become acquainted with him. All his friendly overtures were greeted with hissing and spitting, while her hair stood straight on her upraised back in uncontrolled fury, making her look more like a porcupine than a "nice old pussy." All efforts to pacify her proved unavailing, so the lion had to lead the march alone, with Ring Master Carroll holding his chain.

Next came the clowns, five in all, dressed in huge paper caps and big collars. Their faces were painted in grotesque fashion and their ridiculous antics at once put the audience into good humor. Arthur followed them, dragging his Flyer loaded with the frogs, mice, lizards, and turtles. During the march one of the latter fell off and lay sprawling on the ground, its short little legs kicking about comically. It was too much for Dixie. He broke away from Carter and playfully slapped the turtle over with his paw, turning his head from one side to the other inquisitively, as he did so. He did not

hurt the turtle in the least, and all the rest laughed, but Arthur flared up indignantly.

"Just make your dog keep his old paws off my turtles," he growled, "or I 'll go home."

"My dog's paws are not old, Mr. Boynton," Carter answered with dignified ceremony. "If you are not satisfied with the show, you may go where you please, when you please, and as soon as you please. The sooner the better," he muttered angrily.

Between a quarrelsome cat and an equally quarrelsome boy it began to look as though the "Great Staten Island Circus and Menagerie" would go to pieces then and there, but just at that critical moment Peek-a-Boo created a diversion by jumping up on Dixie's back. At first the small dog resented such treatment, but a few pats from his master served to quiet his uneasiness, and this unexpected addition to the program proved to be a great hit.

Sid, as trick bicycler, did some pretty good stunts, but ended by falling upon his head when trying to stand on his handle-bars, and raising a mountainous bump on his forehead. He pretended that it did not hurt, however, because he was unwilling to tear himself away from the show long enough for Mrs. Carroll to treat the swelling with witch hazel or arnica. Arthur's fancy skating was really fine. His uncle had sent him a splendid pair of ball-bearing steel skates and he had become quite expert in their use. Several other boys did pole balancing acts on the fence, jumped over bars, or turned somersaults. Dixie's dance was an unusually lively

one. It cost the club treasury four large gum-drops before it was finished, but it proved to be one of the most popular acts on the bill.

But after all, it was the youngest club member who made the hit of the afternoon, both literally and figuratively. This was Johnny in his Daring Bareback Riding Act. The Dentons, neighbors of the Carrolls, were people who had lived for several years in Mexico. They owned a burro, and at Carter's earnest request they had consented to loan the little animal for show purposes.

"We'll watch out for him, Mrs. Denton," he reassured her earnestly.

"Watch out for yourselves, Car," Mrs. Denton cautioned. "He's a tricky little beast! That's why we named him the 'Imp.' He's not vicious, though, but just full of mischief."

Immediately this good fortune became known there was a stampede of volunteers to do the Equestrian Act, but Carter's next words quelled the riot.

"Whoever does it has to wear tights, remember," he announced positively.

At this there was a perceptible abating of the first enthusiasm. One after another not only withdrew his request, but positively refused to take the act. Even the sight of the Imp himself, tethered at the back of the tent, calmly grazing on all the grass within reach was not incentive enough. The boys thought nothing of appearing on the running track at the field in proper attire, and their swimming suits were nothing if not abbreviated, but the idea of this trouserless act seemed

different, somehow or other. Finally the youngest member sprang into the breach rather than see the star number of the program abandoned altogether.

"I'll do it, but I don't want to," he said plaintively. "And I have n't any tights, either," he added, hoping that he was presenting an insurmountable difficulty.

"Underdrawers will do," was the concise reply.

By the time the "Greatest Equestrian Feat of the Age" — the feat that had caused the crowned heads of Europe to "sit up and take notice" — was announced, Johnny had entered into the spirit of the thing. His underwear had become fleshlings (they were the proper color, fortunately) and a gayly spangled scarf of Mrs. Carroll's that was stretched across his chest from right shoulder to left hip, then wound about his waist, gave the proper finishing touch to his costume. He both looked and acted the part to perfection as he dashed into the middle of the ring, shook off the large bath slippers he was wearing, and rubbed the soles of his gymnasium shoes carefully upon the box of ground chalk at the side, then, with many bows and gestures of greeting, mounted his prancing steed and prepared to do some fancy riding. Unfortunately the steed stood stolid at first, absolutely refusing to prance. He was finally induced to amble along at a snail's pace, in quest of a bunch of carrots that was dangled tantalizingly just in front of his nose, while his rider stood first on one foot and then on the other on his broad back; turned a somersault into the ring, and remounted with a dash that smacked of the real circus. A few moments later,

however, the Imp suddenly threw off his stolidity and began to enter into the spirit of the show himself. Without warning he set off at a furious pace straight towards the front fence, almost throwing his rider to the ground. At this unexpected turn, Johnny was divided between elation and uncertainty. He had seen the hunters ride at the County Fair, and he felt again the thrill he always experienced as he watched them rise gracefully over brush and bars. Setting his teeth he prepared to make the best of it and go over in fine style.

He did, but the Imp remained behind. He evidently changed his mind at the last minute, or else he realized that the grass he was leaving was far superior to that in the street. At all events he planted his little front feet stubbornly together, and Johnny landed on the other side with a thud. Fortunately he struck a place where there was plenty of grass to break his fall. The boy was "game" ; in an instant he was on his feet bowing gracefully right and left, in such an unembarrassed manner that the jeers became cheers, and even the "S. I. G.'s" themselves thought that he intended to do just what he had done. This act called forth the wildest applause of the afternoon. The daring bareback rider kept pretty quiet for the rest of the afternoon, but no one noticed it, and he was too plucky to complain.

That ended the program and the audience scattered, after a rousing three times three for the "Great Staten Island Circus and Menagerie."

The "S. I. G.'s" were about to follow suit, as they were all tired after their day of hard work, but they

remembered that they had to return borrowed articles, and put the tent in order, so they waited about, talking the affair over among themselves, while the others were getting away. Then they set to work and soon had everything shipshape. As they were tumbling out of the tent, Mrs. Harper raised her window again, and motioned to them. Sid ran over to see what she wanted.

"I've had a reserved seat, Sid," she said smilingly, "and I've enjoyed the circus ever so much. You all deserve credit: it was well managed and the acts were really fine."

Sid straightened up proudly. He knew that Mrs. Harper meant every word she said. That was her charm for the boys, — her sincere interest in them and her appreciation of their efforts. It was not just "talkee talkee!" as the boys called some of the complimentary speeches they received.

"Johnny was n't hurt, was he?" she asked anxiously.

Sid pointed across the street where Johnny, still in his circus tights because he had forgotten to change, was laughing heartily at some joke of Carter's. He did not know that several black and blue spots remained as evidence of the boy's "daring equestrian feat!"

"I want to pay for my ticket," Mrs. Harper went on mischievously. "Tell the boys to wait a moment."

Sid needed no second bidding.

"Sit down! Sit down!" he shouted, as he crossed the street, followed a few moments later by Mrs. Harper's maid carrying a tray filled with glasses, and a large glass pitcher of ice-cold lemonade. Some fresh strawberry

juice had been added to the mixture to give it the proper circus tint. Carter came next, the basket in his hand piled up with small paper bags, one of which he handed to each boy while the maid was passing the lemonade, putting several straws into each glass after she had filled it.

It was the genuine circus combination, red lemonade, straws, and peanuts. Mrs. Harper had thoughtfully telephoned to her husband that morning, and he had sent his office boy all the way home with the peanuts just for this special treat for the boys. But then Mrs. Harper was always thoughtful. Perhaps the fun the "S. I. G.'s" had over the unexpected feast repaid her.

Carter made the boys wait a moment before they started to eat, while he laid down the law to them.

"I have to rake this lawn," he announced grimly, "and it is n't much fun, either, let me tell you; so if any one puts a single peanut shell on my grass, I'll settle him."

Evidently no one of the audience cared to be "settled" because they all obeyed implicitly by stuffing the shells into their pockets. All but one, that is; Johnny forgot that he was still in his circus costume, and began stowing his shells down inside his belt, but stopped suddenly with an "Ouch!" of dismay as their sharp edges scratched his legs. Out of consideration for his untrousered condition he was provided with an empty candy box.

When Carter and Sid went over to Mrs. Grant's, the English neighbor of the Carrolls, to return the two large

flags, the lady good-naturedly asked about the show. They gave her an enthusiastic description and ended by thanking her for the flags.

"We're going to get one of our own for the tent, as soon as we can raise enough money," Carter explained. "It does n't seem like real club headquarters unless we have a flag flying."

They stopped for a few moments on their way back to talk "circus." When they reached home they were surprised to see a large flag again floating over the tent.

"Where'd that flag come from, mother?" Carter shouted up to the window, eagerly.

" 'Mrs. Grant takes pleasure in presenting this flag to the club,' " Mrs. Carroll read from the sheet of note paper in her hand, " 'with her compliments.' You know she found two American flags in the house when she bought it," Mrs. Carroll explained, "and she says that for a loyal subject of the king that's one too many, so you are welcome to one of them."

"Gee! is n't that dandy?" Carter danced about in his delight.

"It certainly is!" his mother replied emphatically. "It's a beautiful flag. You'll appreciate the gift more when you come to price one like it," she added significantly.

The next day a special meeting of the "S. I. G.'s" was called to receive Mrs. Grant's generous gift and acknowledge it properly. The note of thanks they dispatched later by Johnny was a joint effort, and was filled with genuine appreciation of the lady's kindness,

even though it was worded somewhat stiffly. The gift meant so much to them that it seemed to demand a formal document: besides they all stood in awe of the stately Englishwoman.

"We, the 'S. I. G.'s', do hereby gratefully receive and acknowledge one American flag presented to the club by Mrs. Charles R. Grant."

Nine boyish signatures followed. Then the paper was carefully folded and sealed with a great splash of red sealing wax which Carter begged from Minnie for the purpose, so that the finished document presented a truly imposing appearance. But Carter had slipped a little note inside on which was scrawled:

"Thank you ever so much for the flag. It's a splendid one, and all the 'S. I. G.'s' are mighty glad to have it.

"Your friend,

"LINDSAY C. CARROLL, Captain."

CHAPTER VIII

When is a Tent not a Tent?

SID had been unanimously chosen as treasurer of the "S. I. G.'s" when the club was first organized.

"Guess I won't be overworked," he remarked with a smile, as he accepted the office.

"It'll help you in your addition," Carter reminded him with mock gravity. "You'll probably become a lightning calculator, or at least an adder!"

"A subtracter, you mean," Sid corrected him. "I'll be an expert in handling minus quantities. 'A' in algebra for me from now on! Shall I use a pill-box for the club funds, until I can deposit them in the bank? Or do you suppose we will need a cocoa-tin?"

"Funny, I don't think!" Carter commented sarcastically. "Just wait! We'll have some club money some day, you see if we don't."

Carter's prophecy came true sooner than he himself expected. When the treasurer counted up the gate receipts at the close of the circus he found that his box held exactly two dollars and forty cents. Now that the flag was provided, the burning question before the club was the disposal of the funds. Several suggestions were made and negatived, among them a club picnic and a beach party, but there were objections to all the plans.

Finally Arthur brought up the rear guard as usual, and, as usual, his suggestion was sensible.

"But we don't have to spend the money at all," he began in that positive way of his which seemed to make the boys want to oppose him even while they approved of his ideas. "What's the use of using it for something we don't care particularly about when by and by we may have plenty of things that we do care about to use it for?"

A moment's silence greeted Arthur's words. This view of the case had really never occurred to them. It was so novel that it called for deep consideration. After an interval of argument pro and con, the suggestion was adopted, and the "S. I. G.'s" left the conclave with the feeling of real club men, with club funds, club headquarters, and prospects of plenty of good times ahead of them.

The show was simply the first of these. Each morning the nine began to gather in the Carroll garden long before the family finished breakfast. They usually remained until they were summoned by telephone, or verbal messages.

"Would n't it be easier for the boys to bring their trunks, Car?" Mrs. Carroll asked jokingly, although her face was grave. "It must be such a nuisance for them to go all the way home just to eat and sleep."

"I warned you, my lady," Mr. Carroll reminded her. "A tent is the best of bait. Besides, in my humble opinion, the mistress of the house herself is a pretty good drawing-card."

Mrs. Carroll blushed like a girl and dropped the subject. She did not want him to learn how good a drawing-card she had been, because she knew that he would tease her. During the first days of vacation she had told Carter to feel free to invite his friends in for lunch once in a while. She realized that an only child is deprived of much in the way of home-companionship that other children get from brothers and sisters, and she tried to take this way of making home more pleasant for her boy. Theoretically it was a beautiful way, but when put into practice it displayed unexpected disadvantages. The first day, Johnny shared the Carrolls' hospitality, and the three boys had a jolly time. The second day two boys volunteered to forego the pleasures of their home tables, and partake of the Carrolls' luncheon. The third day when Carter entered the dining-room, six boys trailed joyfully after him, six hungry boys, so hungry that poor Minnie was forced to draw upon dinner supplies to satisfy their hearty, boyish appetites.

That was the end of Mrs. Carroll's attempt at unlimited hospitality in the true southern style. On the following day, several volunteers had their hopes rudely shattered by Carter's curt explanation.

"Nothing doing! Minnie kicked, and mother says everybody 's got to eat at home after this."

That settled it. But the tent was really the center of attraction, because it was large enough for all sorts of things. For a time it was a pirate's cave, and a black flag, marked with a terrifying skull and cross-bones in

white, flaunted its fierce message from the tent pole. The boys would rush in from a raid loaded with booty, and eluding capture by almost superhuman effort, they would fly to their cave and fasten the entrance (cleverly hidden by masses of rocks and brush) securely against all pursuers. But the mysterious disappearance of various articles, and a series of vigorous complaints, accompanied by still more vigorous threats from the neighbors, worked a reforming influence on the piratical crew. Their excuse that the articles were to be returned later failed to appease people who wanted lawn-mower and hose, potted plants or wearing apparel just when they wanted them: so the pirates once more became law abiding citizens in embryo.

Next the tent was converted into a wigwam by the addition of pictures on its sides and a totem pole in front. The "S. I. G.'s" became Indian braves with fringed trousers and towering feathered head-dresses. Several roosters in the immediate neighborhood appeared at that time all shaven and shorn, at least as far as their handsome tail feathers were concerned, but some sacrifice had to be made for the sake of historical accuracy of costume. One or two of Ernest Thompson Seton's books were much bethumbed as the club industriously pored over his descriptions.

It was during this time that the Grant twins, Ida and Iva, involuntarily joined in the play. It was really due to their coaxing that their mother had presented the flag. They were pretty, rosy-cheeked English girls, just Carter's age. As is sometimes the case with twins,

they were as different as could be, both in appearance and in character. Ida was a handsome girl, slender, tall and dark, with flashing black eyes, a firm chin, and a commanding manner, while Iva was a roly-poly little blue-eyed, yellow-haired, dimpled-face lassie, who asked instead of commanding, and who always got what she wanted, because people seemed to enjoy doing things for her, she was so grateful and pleased and happy over everything. Both the "I's" as the boys called them, were athletic, fond of rowing and skating, golf and tennis, riding and bicycling, and both were excellent swimmers, too, yet, as Minnie often said: "They're perfect little ladies just the same!" The "perfect little ladies" were great favorites with the boys.

One day while the "S. I. G.'s" were deep in woodcraft and Indian lore, the "I's" were sent on an errand to Mrs. Carroll, and to save the time required to go around the block, they put a ladder up to their hedge and climbed over on to the fence which separated the Grant garden from the Carrolls'. They marched past the wigwam, arm-in-arm, surveying it curiously as they did so. Unfortunately the braves caught sight of the "white maidens" and at once laid plans to capture them on their return. They retired within the wigwam and crouching down, covered themselves with blankets when they heard the girls approaching.

"Come on, let's peep in!" Ida urged eagerly.

"I'm afraid," Iva responded with a little shiver. "They might jump out at us."

"No, they won't!" was the positive assurance.

"They've gone away. I want to see the wigwam. The tent made a splendid cave. I examined it thoroughly that day the boys went over to the Natural History Museum."

"You did, did you?" Carter whispered within, laughingly. "Maybe you won't be as thorough this time, my lady."

Iva still hung back, but Ida advanced stealthily, and lifting the flap which had been dropped peeped cautiously into the dark interior.

"Come on, Iva," she shouted. "They're gone, and they'll never know the difference. Oh! is n't this slick, as Car says?"

Iva followed, and the two girls entered the tent together, only to be greeted by an ear-splitting war-whoop as they were surrounded by upspringing braves. They laughed at first, then they pleaded, but all to no purpose. The braves, deaf to all appeal, proceeded to tie them securely before they retired outside the tent to hold a pow-wow and decide the fate of their captives. By this time both girls were crying: Ida's were tears of rage, and Iva's of woe. They could not help hearing the pow-wow outside. Some of the braves advocated setting the maidens free, and Ida made a mental note of the voices of those that took this stand. Others stood for burning them at the stake, or making them run the gauntlet.

The twins had already been to the kitchen to ask for the eggs that Mrs. Grant needed for her cake-baking that morning, so when an impatient message was telephoned over to send the girls home immediately, Minnie

hurried into the garden to speak to them. As she saw the circle of braves in council, and the tightly tied flap, she remembered the curiosity the girls had displayed in the kitchen regarding the Indian encampment, and grew suspicious. Minnie had not lived with Carter for years without learning something! She knew better than to ask him about the girls. Walking carelessly by as though intent only on her quest for stray clothespins, she caught enough of the argument to understand what had happened.

Quietly slipping towards the back of the tent she crept under the canvas, motioning, finger on lip, for the captives to keep quiet while she deftly unfastened their bonds. A moment later three forms wriggled beneath the canvas, and slipping from one sheltering bush to another gained the haven of the kitchen just as the braves outside the tent decided to make their prisoners run the gauntlet even though one or two still stolidly advocated burning at the stake, and one, Johnny the tender-hearted, pleaded for freedom for them. But the majority ruled. The braves threw back the tent flap and stalked in after their cowering captives only to find the cage empty: the birds had flown away!

This episode resulted in the extermination of that particular tribe of Indians, however. Mrs. Grant, angry at the delay which proved disastrous to her day's baking, questioned the tardy messengers closely. By the time they reached home the girls had recovered from their wrath. It is much easier to see a joke after it is over, especially when one has successfully fooled the

jokers, so the "white maidens" tried hard to protect the culprits, but, though in no way related to George Washington, or his English prototype, they could not tell a lie, and their mother finally wrung from them, bit by bit, the story of their capture.

A tart little note from Mrs. Grant settled the matter: she had had no time to recover from her wrath. A "sad" cake confronted her and helped to keep it blazing. After that the Indians disappeared from their customary haunts, probably to their Happy Hunting Grounds. At all events they were seen no more on Staten Island. The ugly wooden images were removed from the tent pole, which once more flew the "Stars and Stripes," while the wigwam was metamorphosed into a fort for Uncle Sam's protection.

Squads of soldiers clad in their "U. B. B. A." summer suits of khaki, drilled assiduously before the general's headquarters. They carried the discarded wooden guns of company H, because their request for their real guns had been refused. Dispatch messengers, dust-covered but eager, came and went with alarming frequency. Carter as sentry, marched back and forth with such tireless energy that even good-natured Minnie remarked sarcastically: "Yes, an' if he had to take that many steps a-runnin' the errands, he'd be awfully imposed on, that he would!" But it was a realistic camp scene, nevertheless.

Once, one of the orderlies brought in news of the defeat and capture of their division, and the death of the general in command. The flag was lowered to half-mast, and the

drums beat a muffled dirge until Minnie threatened either to commit suicide or murder the drummers. Fortunately, at this crisis, another messenger wheeled up bringing word that the general was not even wounded but had escaped just in time to enter the second engagement. Defeat had been turned into victory, and he was even then on his way to join the forces at Camp S. I. G. The doleful tattoo became vigorously joyful, and the flag was promptly run up to the top of the pole once more.

While the soldier fever was at its height the camp adopted a password, and any one approaching was greeted with the stern, military formula:

"Halt! who goes there?"

"Friend!"

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign!"

Just at that time Minnie elected to inspect camp, one third out of curiosity, the other two thirds from a desire to investigate the disappearance of various frying pans and kitchen utensils that had undoubtedly been drafted for use at camp mess. A kettle swung on three poles at the back of the tent, and the oven, which the boys had made the first day Sid came over for his visit, was still in active service. Minnie's proposed inspection was not by request, except her own.

"I'm a-comin' out to look at yer camp, Car," she announced with a grim smile, one morning when an unusual deficiency in the kitchen had made the preparation of breakfast a temper-trying period even for the usually sunny-tempered girl.

Carter grew suspicious of this sudden interest, and tried to head her off.

"Sorry, Min, but you won't be allowed to get in unless you have the password, you know. The general cannot be disturbed," he added grandly.

"I'll git the password all right," Minnie answered confidently. "An' it ain't the general I'm after, neither," she added under her breath.

Carter informed the others of the expected invasion.

"Let's change the word," Sid suggested promptly.

"Yes, your mother knows the one we have now," Arthur added. "She might give it away — accidentally," he amended hastily, as he saw Carter bristle up angrily. "Of course she would n't do it on purpose, of course not!"

"All right," Carter agreed. "We'll think up a corker this time. 'General Grant' was too easy. How about 'Cuba,' or 'Philippines,' or — "

"Let's take 'Invader,'" Sid proposed. "That hits the nail on the head exactly."

The rest agreed that the new word was a good one, and that Mistress Minnie would not find it such an easy matter to break through the rigid rules of the United States army, as she seemed to think it was. They themselves knew something of the matter from their experiences at Camp Lookout. Besides, it was well for women to learn the stuff of which their country's defenders was made. The "I's" had taken their lesson to heart. They had displayed no further interest in the "S. I. G." headquarters. To them, a tent under any other name would be just as hateful.

But Minnie proved herself stronger than Uncle Sam after all. Just as it struck ten she appeared outside the tent and demanded admittance. Promptly Carter stepped forward with the usual challenge, to which Minnie responded with equal promptitude until he reached the words: "Advance, friend, and give the countersign!"

Minnie advanced all right, and without a word, let go of her apron which she had been holding gathered up in one hand. The fall of the curtain displayed a bowl of sugar-coated doughnuts, fresh, crisp, and smoking hot.

If the boys had been classical students they might have recalled the stirring story of the Siege of Troy, and the colossal Wooden Horse filled with picked men, which the Greeks left without the city walls while they took ship and pretended to sail away. They might have remembered the words of the prophetess Cassandra: "Beware of the Greeks bearing gifts!" and refused this offering. But they did nothing of the sort. The Greeks bearing gifts were of no importance to them, while Minnie, bearing doughnuts — that was a different story! Military discipline fell flat. The fort capitulated without terms, conquered by a dish of doughnuts.

As they fell upon the spoils with boyish appetites sharpened by vigorous marchings and counter marchings, Minnie executed a flank movement, and fell upon the rear of their defences, quietly slipping into the tent on her promised tour of inspection. She departed, ten minutes later, via lifted canvas at the rear, with the result of her raid piled high in her arms — a broiler, a

frying pan, the hatchet, several cooking spoons and forks, and her very best saucepan. In her exit, her eye caught a gleam of color from a rain-soaked, begrimed heap lying on the ground at the back of the tent. The object looked strangely familiar, and closer examination showed that it had once been the striped cover from the library couch, which, during the tent's Indian existence, had been converted into a blanket for the Big Chief. Minnie examined it critically, and decided that it was not worth carrying into the house.

"Well," she remarked, resignedly, "vacation can't last forever, that's one blessing! If I had my way there would n't be none at all!"

When she saw the condition her broiler and pans were in she grumbled and scolded mightily. She did n't see why the boys had to play soldier! She did n't see why they had to play at all. She did n't see why there were any boys, anyway, so there! But Minnie's bark, like Dixie Doodle's, was always worse than her bite.

CHAPTER IX

A Narrow Escape

WHILE Minnie's wrath was still at fever heat, Carter dashed into the kitchen, hastily unbuttoning his military blouse as he ran.

"Say, Min, we're all going to the beach to-day. Put me up some lunch, will you? Hurry! We want to get off right away."

"Have n't any time to put up lunches to-day," she announced with grim decision. "I've got scouring to do." She pointed to the rusty-looking pans and the greasy broiler significantly.

"All right for you, Min," Carter began in injured tones. "I suppose I'll have to tell the fellows Sid and I can't go." He waited for her next move knowing that her anger was short lived.

"Anyhow, I have n't anything to put up," she added shortly.

"Oh, you can rake up something," he assured her confidently, now that the storm had blown over. "Some fruit or cake, and a couple of hard-boiled eggs apiece, and some sandwiches 'll do."

"Have n't anything to put in the sandwiches."

"Open a jar of preserves or something, if you have n't any meat," he urged. "And put in a piece of cheese or

a hunk of pie, will you? And don't forget the paper of pepper and salt for the eggs like you did last time."

"Perhaps you'd better do it yourself, Mister Carroll," Minnie began freezingly, but Carter cut her short.

"No, ma'am! I'm not in it with you! Thank you, Min!" He dashed out, and Minnie, completely mollified, set to work on the lunch.

He reappeared again in a moment, demanding impatiently: "Where on earth did you put our bathing suits? I left them right here in the laundry. I do wish you'd let my things alone after this."

Even worms will turn, and Minnie was not a worm.

"Yes, and if I'd left those suits alone," she flashed back angrily, "you would n't 've had any at all, so there! An' you did n't leave 'em in the laundry, either! Ye left 'em on the line without any clothespins to hold 'em, an' they blew over into Mrs. Grant's yard, so there! That billy-goat of theirs was just beginnin' to chew 'em up when I scared him off with the clothes pole, an' fished 'em over the fence."

"You're all right, Min," Carter acknowledged heartily. "I'll eat an ice-cream cone for you to-day."

"That's right good of you, Car!" Minnie received his generous offer with a broad smile: by this time she had recovered her usual good humor. "But if it's all the same to you, I'll eat my own ice-cream cones. I'll have the lunch ready by the time you boys are."

Fifteen minutes later the "S. I. G.'s" fell in as the procession swung along the block on its way to the beach car, each boy carrying his lunch box and dangling his

bathing suit, wrapped in a bath towel, at the end of a long strap. Just as they were about to scramble on to the car, already crowded almost to its capacity, Carter discovered that Dixie had pranced along after them.

"You rascal!" he said crossly. "I'll have to run him home again, fellows. Go on! I'll try to get the next car."

"That'll be too late," Sid said decidedly. "We won't have time to go in before lunch if you do. Let's go by train and take him along."

"But he has n't his muzzle on," Carter objected. "Dog-catchers might get him!"

"We'll all watch him," Sid promised. "I'd like to see a dog-catcher or any one else get old Doodles with this crowd on guard. Come on! it's after eleven now."

Carter hesitated for an instant. He loved the little animal dearly, and he had heard that the dog laws were very strict that summer. Every dog was required to wear a muzzle on the street, even if he wore a collar, and a license, and was on a leash. There had been several violent quarrels between the dog-catchers and irate owners, and even one or two law suits. The law was all right, but the manner of enforcing it was brutal, and the men chosen to do the work were of the class that abuses any power entrusted to it. In previous years a dog captured by the dog wagon could be redeemed on the payment of a three-dollar fine, but that summer there had been several "mad dog" scares, due to excitable people who did not understand the animals at all, and the law permitted the catchers to kill the dogs without

notice of any kind to the owners. Carter did not know this, however.

"Come on," several voices urged, while he still stood irresolute. "No dog-catchers at the beach; he'll be safe enough there."

So the boy yielded, and gathering the small dog up in his arms sprinted for the train whose whistle sounded at that moment. Hurrying into the car at the end farthest from the conductor, he pushed Dixie under the seat, while three boys sat down in front of him, to hide him from view. Everything went well until the conductor came through for the tickets. As ill luck would have it, he stepped into that very seat to allow a lady to pass down the aisle. Dixie, seeing a pair of strange legs thrust unexpectedly, close to his nose, growled and tried to jump out of his retreat.

"Keep quiet, you silly!" Carter commanded in a fierce whisper, trying to push him back with his foot while one of the boys growled to distract the man's attention. But the conductor had heard the real growl and turned to them angrily.

"What 've you got under that seat?" he demanded.

"It — it's only — my puppy," Carter stammered, his face flushed with embarrassment. At that moment Dixie managed to wriggle out between the imprisoning legs and greeted the conductor with a friendly wag of his tail. The man looked at him and laughed.

"Guess this little splinter 's not very dangerous," he remarked good-naturedly, as he stroked the small dog with the gentle touch of a lover of animals. "All the

same," speaking more sternly to Carter, "you had no right to bring him in here, and you know it. He belongs in the baggage car. It's early yet for the train crowd, so I'll let him stay to-day, but don't try it on again, my boy.

"Come here, you sliver," he commanded the dog, who obeyed willingly. "That's a fine, soft coat you've got on, but where's your muzzle, sir? You'd better tell your master to watch out or the goblins 'll git ye! Look here, son, this is too nice a little fellow to be put in a gas tank."

"A gas tank?" the boys repeated wonderingly, not understanding what the conductor meant.

"That's what I said. They don't let anybody buy back their dogs, this year, no matter what they're willing to pay. Into a big gas tank they go, big and little, old and young, handsome and ugly, and that's the last of Mr. Dog! So watch out!"

"I will," Carter answered gratefully. "Thank you for telling me. I — I don't think I'll go in bathing to-day," he added to the boys after the conductor went on. "I'm going to keep my eye on old Doodles."

But on the sand they met Mrs. Grant, who kindly offered to take charge of Dixie while the boys were in their bath-houses. The "I.'s" were just ready to go in for their daily swim. They looked girlishly dainty in their dark blue bathing suits, made as simply as possible and trimmed only with bright red ties to match their bathing caps. They chatted with the boys for a few minutes, then dashed into the water and were soon swimming

far beyond the raft, while the boys hurried into the bathing pavilion. When they came out they hung the rubber cords holding their bath-house keys around Dixie's neck, and gave him a lively chase up and down the sand. He enjoyed the romp as long as they kept away from the water, but once or twice in the midst of the race he was caught by a wave higher than the rest, and scrambled up the beach towards the board walk in genuine fear.

"Is it not strange that he should dislike the water so?" Mrs. Grant asked in surprise. She was a stately woman, very formal in speech. The boys stood somewhat in awe of her. Being English, she could not in the least understand the little fellow's distaste for a bath.

"No, ma'am," Carter answered promptly. "The boys who were chasing him when mother rescued him, said that he had been ducked once until he was almost dead. He remembers it, don't you, old Billykin?"

"He misses lots of fun, let me tell you," Sid added regretfully. "Just look at those dogs! They 're having a dandy time." As he spoke he pointed to two cocker spaniels that were splashing about in the waves, and swimming out to retrieve bits of driftwood. They seemed to be enjoying the water as much as the bathers were doing. "I 'd just make him get used to it, if I were you, Car. He 'll probably like it, now. Of course, it was different before. Are you going to try him?"

"I would," urged Johnny. "It 's good for him. Can he swim?"

"Can he swim?" Carter repeated in sarcastic tones, not a little nettled over the criticism of his pet, kindly

though it was. "Can a fish swim, you crazy! Of course he can swim. Did you ever see a dog that could n't, unless he was hurt in some way?"

And to prove the truth of his assertion he picked Dixie up in his arms and dashed into the water, the boys following, eager to see how the dog would act. Carter carried him far beyond his depth, Dixie, at first, squirming and twisting in his frantic efforts to escape; but later, in deeper water, clinging to his master's arms with a frightened look in his handsome brown eyes, and making pitiful little moans of protest.

"Ah! see the poor little thing! He 's scared to death!" one woman commented pityingly.

"Queer for a dog, is n't it?" her companion answered. "Must be a regular bump on a log!"

Carter favored the last speaker with an angry glare, but the words made him more determined than ever to conquer Dixie's dislike.

"There! there! old fellow!" he patted him soothingly. "Go on, now, and show them what you can do in the swimming line."

He tossed the dog into the water as he spoke the encouraging words, and Dixie did show them, amid much laughing and clapping of hands. He fairly churned the water with his quick, short strokes, as he swam rapidly towards the shore. As soon as he reached the beach he shook himself hard, giving little angry growls as he did so, then dashed up the sand.

"Mrs. Grant 'll tend to him," Carter said. "He 'll roll in the hot sand until he 's dry. Now do you believe

he can swim or not?" he demanded angrily, turning upon Johnny.

"Can he swim? Well, I guess!" Johnny's enthusiasm atoned for his earlier doubts. "Come on, let's stunt each other from the raft."

They swam out to the raft, and for the next fifteen minutes forgot everything in the sheer joy of living. They performed high dives, sidewise ones, clean cuts, and, on Arthur's part, one or two flats. Carter was an especially good diver. Even the bathing master at the pavilion complimented him on his proficiency. Then they varied the amusement by pushing each other off into the water and seeing how quickly they could scramble up on to the raft again. In one of these races, Sid brought up a crab very much alive and kicking.

"Caught a crab, did n't you?" Johnny asked innocently.

"Foolish question number 9,999," Carter said promptly.

"It is n't either," Sid defended Johnny; "because the crab 's caught me. Ouch! some one reason with him, do! He 's a business-like old fellow, let me tell you."

It was almost one o'clock, before they were ready to come out of the water, and they would not have been ready then had they not suddenly become aware that swimming is hungry work. So they took a final dive before heading for the beach, and were just rushing through the tunnel to the bath-houses when they remembered their keys, and hurried back to find Dixie and rob him of his necklaces.

They found Mrs. Grant just where they had left her. The "I.'s" had gone in to dress, and she was awaiting their return. Dixie Doodle, however, was nowhere in sight.

"Where 's Dix, Mrs. Grant?" Carter asked anxiously.

"Dixie!" the lady repeated in astonishment. "Why, is he not with you? I have not seen him since you took him into the water. I went over to listen to the band until I thought you were ready to go in, when I came back to take care of him while you dressed."

The boys looked at each other in dismay, then they started on a hurried search up and down the beach, calling and whistling, commanding and coaxing, but no small dog appeared in answer to their appeals. By this time they were genuinely anxious. They were cold, too: one of those sudden changes in the weather had taken place; a sharp wind was blowing in from the ocean that cut through their wet bathing suits like an edged knife. Their lips began to get blue, and they found it hard to conquer the fits of shivering that seized them. In addition to this they were hungry, but they did not care to eat in their wet bathing suits, even if they had not been so anxious to find the dog. Then, too, their lunch boxes were in the bath-houses to which he held the open sesame!

Carter grew more and more worried as the search dragged on. He had a guilty feeling that he had neglected the little animal, fond as he was of him. Suppose one of the dog-catchers had taken him! Dixie was so used to love and petting now, that it would be an easy matter

to capture him. Suppose they were getting ready to put him into that gas tank the conductor spoke of! Oh! it was too dreadful! He smothered a sob as he hurried from one place to another in anxious search.

Meanwhile Arthur had gone to the office of the bathing pavilion to explain their dilemma, and see whether one of the attendants could not open their houses for them.

"What numbers were they?" the clerk asked crossly; he did not like irregularity in the management of the bath-houses, not if it disturbed his conversation with the girls from the restaurant next door, at least.

"Why — why — " poor Arthur felt that he was cornered. "They were all in a row, the third or fourth aisle, I think."

"You think! And you expect us to open other people's doors just to please a lot of careless boys, do you?"

It was hopeless, and Arthur, cold and hungry, turned away, not much comforted by the clerk's grudging assurance that he would have the attendant keep watch, and any houses that were still locked at the end of another half hour would be opened. Just as he jumped off the board walk on to the beach a crowd of children raced towards him, screaming at the top of their voices.

"It 's moving! It 's moving! Oh! I 'm afraid!"

"What 's the matter?" he asked of the little ones. "What 's moving?"

"Why, the sand! D' you suppose it 's a ghost?" the youngster asked with a shiver half earnest, half assumed.

"More likely a crab or a sand spider," Arthur declared in disdain.

"'T ain't either!" one of the little girls asserted aggressively. "It 's too big. There! is n't it? Now do you see it move? Do you?"

Arthur gazed in the direction her small finger indicated, and saw a large mound of sand undoubtedly agitated. First it rose, then it fell, then a shower of sand flew in all directions sending the little ones scurrying away shrieking harder than ever. Arthur ran too, but towards the animated hump of sand.

"Oh, you dear old fellow!" he exclaimed seizing the bundle, sand and all, in his arms, and hugging it tight.

Dixie looked up yawning and stretching sleepily while Arthur whistled the club call and the others came rushing up.

"Where 'd you find him?" Carter asked, breathlessly. "You rascal!" But he too hugged him as he spoke.

"He must have burrowed into the warm sand and fallen asleep," Arthur explained. "He was just stretching himself and rolling over when he scared those children. You ought to have seen them beat it!"

After that they each had to "shake hands" with their recovered mascot, or pet him in some way. The dog was a favorite with them all, and they had been much more anxious to find him than to recover their lost keys.

"Guess we won't try to throw you in again, Mr. Dix," Johnny said decidedly. "You certainly got even with us, did n't you, old boy? But I don't believe you meant to do it, all the same."

And Dixie licked his face, then frisked about with

sharp little barks. He too had had a swim, and he too, was hungry.

"Come on," Carter shouted, "he 's starved and so are we!"

The boys pulled off their key straps and scattered to their bath-houses. Carter managed to elude the watchful eye of the attendant and carried Dixie with him for safe keeping. In an incredibly short time, compared to the length of time it took them to dress at home each morning, they were out again, had put their suits through the wringer and strapped them up, and were settled on the sand under one of the huge umbrellas, eating away as though they really were starved as Carter had declared.

After lunch they treated themselves to ice-cream cones, Dixie enjoying his as much as the boys; then some of them tried the "Barrel of Fun," others the moving pictures or the scenic railway, but Carter and Sid preferred the merry-go-round. Dixie climbed up on the whirling platform and though Carter captured the brass ring twice in succession, giving him two free rides, Dixie stayed on with him each time. At the end of the third round when he stepped off and lifted the small dog down, Dixie spun about dizzily much to every one's amusement. It was several moments before he could walk straight.

As the boys left the train they met Mrs. Grant. She detained Carter and Sid for a moment to ask where they had found Dixie.

"The girls just telephoned over for you," she added, after they had told her about their long search. "They

are making ice-cream taffy, and want —" She stopped short, then began to laugh because both boys had set off at a run, murmuring some indistinct explanation as they started. When they reached their own corner Carter ordered Dixie home because the Grants kept cats and a goat. Dixie did not mind the former, but they seemed to mind him most decidedly. As for the goat, he and Dixie were sworn foes.

"Go home, old boy!" Carter commanded sharply.

Dixie looked up at him, his whole heart in his big brown eyes. He did n't want to go home; he wanted to go wherever his master was going.

"Go home, sir! Do you hear me?" he made a threatening gesture towards a stone, and Dixie retreated in dignified displeasure.

"Can he get in?" Sid asked.

"Yep!" was the laconic reply. "There 's a picket loose near the corner and he squeezes through. Come on, or it 'll be too hard to pull." He meant the candy, not the picket.

The two dashed around the corner into the Grants' garden. Even before they reached the back piazza they could smell the taffy. The "I.'s" were splendid little cooks, and their friends never refused any of their treats. Besides they were such bright, jolly girls, "almost as good as boys," Carter once said of them. He meant it as a compliment. He had intended to call over to Minnie to take Dixie into the house, but the delicious odor of the taffy drove it from his mind. Instead he and Sid rushed in on the girls with a war-whoop

which made them jump, and caused Iva to scurry into the hall.

As the boys turned one corner, a covered wagon dashed around the other one, and started up the avenue upon which the Carrolls lived. As soon as the driver caught sight of Dixie reluctantly making his way toward home, he stopped his horse and sprang down from the seat, holding in one hand a coil of rope with a slip noose at the end. When he had almost reached the small dog he began, in wheedling tones: "Nice doggie! good doggie! come here, boy!"

Minnie happened to open the front door at that moment to look into the mail box. When she caught sight of the man, and recognized the wagon waiting at the corner, she turned to see what poor victim he was coaxing into the toils. To her horror she discovered that it was Dixie Doodle, their own dear little pet that the whole family loved as one of themselves. She saw, too, with sinking heart, that he was outside the gate and unmuzzled.

She realized that she could not possibly reach the dog before the dog-catcher did, so she used her quick wit to some purpose. Minnie was pretty at all times, and knew it quite well: but when she was dressed for the afternoon in her crisp black lawn, with white embroidered collar and cuffs, and dainty frilled apron with its becoming bib, she presented a picture well worth seeing. The dog-catcher seemed to find her decidedly good to look upon as she tossed her head in a coquettish fashion, and gazed at him with her big, dark, Irish eyes. He

stopped short, and she promptly opened fire upon the enemy. She had long ago given up her Irish brogue but could still use it on special occasions.

"Good-day to you, sir," she called out gayly. "It 's Mr. — Mr. — ah! sure but I 've forgot the name. It 's slipped from me intirely. But I have n't forgot the features."

The man lifted his cap gallantly, grinning all over his ugly face.

"MacDuffy, Miss, Mike MacDuffy at yer service," he informed her promptly. "An' what might your name be?"

"Don't ye remember me?" Minnie asked with a dazzling display of her white, even teeth. "Sure, an' I 'm not used to bein' forgotten, I must say," she ended poutingly, tripping lightly down the path as she spoke, and stopping on the way to pluck a flower. When she reached the gate she stepped out on to the pavement and held it towards him with an inviting gesture.

"Sure, it 's a bachelor's button I have for you," she said saucily.

The man dropped the coil of rope after a hasty glance towards his victim which showed him that the small dog was nosing contentedly about near the fence, unconscious of danger, and allowed Minnie to fasten the flower in his buttonhole, grinning even more broadly if possible as he did so, and looking down admiringly at the girl's sleek, dark hair.

"It 's an honor to be decorated by sich fair hands," he complimented her gushingly.

"Ah, go way with ye!" she replied with a ringing laugh. "Sure ye must 've kissed the Blarney Stone before ye come over here. Even yer horse is tired of waitin' fer sich a slow-poke."

As she spoke she gave him a playful push, and when he turned to look after his horse, she seized Dixie, and flew towards the gate, wrapping him hard and fast in her fresh white apron as she ran. The small dog was unused to such treatment from her, and struggled so frantically to free himself that she had to give him a sharp blow on the head to quiet him.

But the man was too quick for her; he reached the gate before she could unlatch it. He did not notice her burden at first, so deftly had she managed it; he simply wanted to have a little more conversation with the pretty Irish lassie. But his glance happened to fall upon the place where Dixie had been standing and he looked about in search of his prey, while Minnie stood close to the gate, her back turned to him.

"Where 'd that confounded pup git to?" he asked irritably, throwing gallantry to the winds as soon as it interfered with business.

Minnie turned part way and peered past him up the street, exclaiming: "That little fellow? That brown dog, d 'ye mean?" and as the man wheeled about, she threw wide the gate and dashed up the path. Rushing into the house she slammed and locked the door, then sat down on the hall floor and burst into tears, petting and smoothing Dixie as though the small dog had been rescued from the grave, as indeed he had been.

"Poor little doggie-woggie! Bad old man sha'n't git Minnie's little pet, no he sha'n't! Not if Minnie knows it! Minnie 'll settle him! Yes, sir, she 'll whip him! Tryin' to put an old rope around this pretty little neck! Thought he was goin' to put this boy into a nasty old gas tank, did n't he? But Minnie fooled him, that she did!"

All the time she was speaking, she was rubbing Dixie's neck as gently as though the hateful rope had actually jerked him away, while Dixie, enjoying the petting, tried to express his gratitude by licking her face with a fond little red tongue.

Mrs. Carroll, hearing the door slam, came down to see what was the trouble. She, too, joined in the petting-fest. She felt angry with Carter for his carelessness, as the small dog had been in his charge.

When the boys reached home, carrying their portions of the snowy taffy carefully cut into marbles and done up in paraffine paper, Minnie told them the whole story, and once more the dog was petted and fondled, but this time it was by Sid, because Carter, feeling guilty and ashamed for taking such a risk just for his own selfishness, hurried to the tool chest after a hammer and nails, and nailed the loose picket hard and fast. His petting came later.

"You keep all my taffy, Minnie," he urged earnestly. Minnie had a whole set of "sweet" teeth, but so had Carter himself. "Please do, Minnie," he insisted when she tried to refuse. "I want you to have it."

With that he lifted Dixie up in his arms as carefully

as though the dog's harrowing experience had deprived him of the power of locomotion, and started to leave the kitchen, but stopped at the door, and informed Minnie seriously: "Say Min, the very first time I see that curly-headed grocery-man of yours, I 'm going to tell him what a trump his girl is!"

"Sure you don't have to tell him!" Minnie answered with a coquettish laugh. "He knows it already!"

CHAPTER X

A Five-dollar Bill

DIXIE received so much attention during the next few days that he was in a fair way to be spoiled. Possibly the family deserved Mrs. Walton's tart criticism: "Humph! they'd better give all that care to some poor child instead of to a disagreeable yellow dog." But Mrs. Walton herself was far from pleasant, and to the disagreeable all things are disagreeable. She might well have acted on her own suggestion, for she had neither child nor dog; but it was much easier for her to see the mote in the Carrolls' eyes, and forget the beam in her own. She disliked boys and dogs intensely and they returned her dislike in full measure, pressed down and running over.

Nevertheless, Dixie did his best, during the following week, to deserve her criticism. One of his worst faults was his habit of digging. Mr. Carroll always scolded when he found unsightly holes in the lawn, and Carter had whipped the small culprit more than once without making much impression upon him. The dog seemed to enjoy the work so: his paws fairly flew, and his little black-tipped nose became a regular shovel; but the result of his labors was neither ornamental nor useful. In fact, Mrs. Carroll almost broke her ankle once, by

stepping into one of the holes. Of late, however, he seemed to be giving up his bad habit.

Not long after Dixie's rescue, Carter and Sid were in New York — they had gone to the Museum to see the Peary exhibit — and Mrs. Carroll was spending the day in Brooklyn, when Dixie, probably out of sheer loneliness, killed time by digging a hole close to the side of the house. He worked hard over it, and by dark it was both large and deep. That night it rained steadily, and the next morning Minnie complained that the wall of the cellar was dripping with dampness. As several things about the house needed attention, Carter was dispatched to inform Mrs. Markham, the landlady.

Just as Mrs. Markham drove up to the gate that afternoon, the boys discovered Dixie working away for dear life, evidently putting the finishing touch to his labors of the day before.

"What on earth are you doing there, you rascal?" Carter demanded angrily. Dixie was not doing anything on earth, as it happened — it was in earth; but the boy was too excited to remember such little things. "Guess you think you'll dig down to Pig Tail Land, don't you? Better not, if you don't want to be stewed. They eat puppy dogs, down there; sure they do! There comes the landlady now. Good! she's gone into Mrs. Harper's! Scoot, old fellow! Do you hear?"

Then he and Sid began to toss rocks and dirt into the hole over which the dog had worked so patiently. They had barely finished their task when Mrs. Markham

reappeared, and began a careful examination of the side of the house.

"Why, here's the trouble, Carter!" she exclaimed the instant she caught sight of the broken ground. "You must have rats about. We'll have to fill all this up with cinders, don't you think so?"

"Yes 'm," he assented politely.

"How is that dear little dog of yours?" she asked kindly. "Mrs. Harper tells me he's as bright as a little button. What did you name him?"

"Dixie Doodle," Carter answered.

At the sound, the owner of the name started towards them, but Carter shot a stone over his shoulder to check his joyful progress. He knew that the little black tip on the end of the dog's nose was covered with tell-tale yellow mud, and he preferred to punish him himself.

After the landlady had taken her departure he did punish him so severely that it seemed to make a real impression upon his canine mind. At any rate, he stopped digging. Perhaps his reformation was partly due to the load of cinders which Mrs. Markham ordered to be put all around the house, his favorite digging field.

The next morning Mrs. Carroll handed Minnie a five-dollar bill to pay for some groceries that were coming over from New York. When the things arrived and Minnie started to give the boy the money for them, the bill had disappeared. She moved everything on the table, searched about the sink, and examined all the pantry shelves, but no bill could be found. By this time she was really anxious, and ran upstairs to ask Mrs.

Carroll whether she had taken the money again. Then the two for the second time went over everything in the kitchen thoroughly, but without result. Finally Mrs. Carroll had to give the waiting boy a cheque for the amount.

"You don't think I took that money, do you?" Minnie whispered as soon as the boy left the kitchen. She was almost crying as she spoke.

"I don't think, I know you did not!" Mrs. Carroll answered so positively that the sun once more shone through Minnie's storm, and the faithful girl felt that life was worth living again. "But Mr. Carroll is so hard pressed for ready money, just now," Mrs. Carroll added with a sigh. "I feel as though we ought to give up our trip to the lakes this year, but Carter is looking thinner than usual and needs the change of air. I do hope we will find that bill somewhere."

For the next few days the whole family kept their eyes open, on the lookout for the missing money. Mrs. Carroll offered fifty cents reward to the finder, so the boys set to work, and later were joined by the rest of the "S. I. G.'s." Fifty cents meant beach and bath-house, car fare and cracker-jack, so it was worth trying for, but the glory of success would have been incentive enough. They scoured kitchen, pantry, and laundry; then they examined the garden from fence to fence, but all to no purpose. When Minnie finally suggested that if the Carroll family wanted any dinner that night at least nine boys would have to clear out from under foot, they seemed so disappointed that she took pity on them.

"Sure an' it's pretty hard you all worked even if you did n't find the money. If yer mother says yes, you can have these lemons an' some sugar, Car. Mebbe she'll let you crack a bit of ice for it."

Mrs. Carroll consented and the treasure hunters mixed a big pitcher of lemonade. It was quantity instead of quality, but it was sweet and cold, and they found it quite a consolation for their unsuccessful efforts.

On the following Saturday, while the family were at breakfast, a soiled envelope was handed to Mrs. Carroll. It was addressed in a big, boyish scrawl with the word "Important" in black letters in one corner.

"There's a little fellow waitin' in the kitchen to take back the answer," Minnie informed her mistress.

When Mrs. Carroll opened the envelope a crumpled bit of paper fell into her lap, unnoticed by her, and fluttered to the floor as she spread out the letter. Dixie seized it, and darting under the table began to chew it, but Carter happened to catch sight of him as he was disappearing, and jerking him out unceremoniously, rescued the enclosure.

"Well, look here!" he exclaimed in surprise. "It's money, mother, real money! Yes, sir, it's a five-dollar bill, or what's left of it, rather. I'll bet it's our bill!"

"Give it to me, Carter," Mrs. Carroll spoke excitedly. "Poor boy! I'm so glad he sent it back."

"What boy? Who? Where'd it come from?" Carter questioned eagerly.

"Perhaps your mother might be able to tell you if

you give her half a chance, Car," Mr. Carroll remarked mildly. "If there is ever a prize offered for rapid-fire questions, I'm sure you'll take it. What is it all about, Eve?" he asked turning to his wife. "Whose money is it? How did it happen to be in a letter, all chewed up in this way?"

Mrs. Carroll laughed.

"Possibly Carter's father might be a close second in a rapid-fire question contest," she said mischievously, as soon as she could speak.

"Oh, pshaw!" he ejaculated somewhat nettled; "I just wanted to know —"

"So did Car. It seems to be a family trait. Judging from this letter, Dickey Bird 'wanted to know' too. I'll read you what it says," she added soberly. "The boy who wrote it deserves all the help that he can get — it took genuine courage to send this.

"To the Lady of the House.

"I cant keep this here money. I tried to but it bothered me so hard I could nt make myself use it. I hope it aint spoiled to mutch. I didnt tear it. It was that little brown dog of yours. He stood on his hind legs when the girl was puttin the groceries away and poked at it until he pushed it off the table. I didnt know what he was chewin until your girl began huntin fer the money. When she went up to tell you I peeked under the table and saw it was the five dollar bill. I took it away from the mutt and meant to give it to her when she came down but I didnt an Im awful sorry now. I wont ever take anything again if you will just forgive me this time. Itll be a lesson to me all my life. Ive always been honest, except this one time. Will you give me another chance please?

"Yours with respect

"Harry R. Smith."

There was silence for a moment after Mrs. Carroll finished reading the letter. They all felt sorry for the writer.

"He's just a boy, remember," Mrs. Carroll said at last, with a suspicious little break in her voice. "Why, he could n't be much older than Carter and Sid, poor lad."

"What are you going to do about it?" the boys asked almost in one voice.

"He must have been genuinely sorry," Mr. Carroll added gravely, "or he would not have confessed and returned the money."

"I think so, too," Mrs. Carroll said eagerly. "We never once connected him with the loss, did we, boys? He has confessed entirely of his own accord. I think that ought to count for a great deal. A really bad boy would never do that, would he, dear?"

"No, indeed," Mr. Carroll agreed promptly and received a pleased look from his wife as she hurried away to answer the boy's letter.

It was a kind, helpful, motherly answer, one that made the lad feel that life offered too much that was noble for him to become ignoble. And Mrs. Carroll's forgiveness, when she might have been harsh and unforgiving, did him the greatest good of all. The next time he came with groceries she had a little talk with him, and explained that she was making herself responsible for his future honesty by not reporting him to the firm for which he worked. Some months later, Mrs. Carroll happened to be in the store and asked how the

boy was getting along. When she was told that he was soon to be promoted, she received the news with genuine pleasure and thankfulness.

It was some months after the loss and return of the five-dollar bill that Dixie Doodle made up for his part in its disappearance by doing something so helpful that it more than atoned for any wickedness of his puppy days.

During these first vacation weeks of fun and frolic, the team had not once forgotten the real reason for its organization as a baseball nine. In the midst of their good times the boys still managed to get in some pretty steady work on the field. Their rivals, the "Stars," also practiced diligently, besides playing other teams; but the "S. I. G.'s" had determined not to challenge any one until they felt themselves ready for the fray.

They were fortunate in securing the help of Johnny Porter's uncle, Sidney Porter, who played on the Princeton nine. He made them stand around at a pretty lively rate, but he corrected their faults and strengthened the weak spots in the team work. They appreciated this, and endured his "bossiness" and his lordly contempt with the best grace they could muster. It was hard, though, even in the face of all his efforts in their behalf, to be dubbed "kids," and "raw ones," and treated as though they were kindergarten youngsters playing with a knitted ball!

"If he was Matty himself, he could n't rub it in harder," Sid complained one day when his best efforts

in the pitching line had brought forth only criticism, or what was worse, ridicule.

"Don't you care," Carter advised soothingly. "He's helping us get ready for the 'Stars,' remember. We organized as a baseball team just on their account, and our whole club will be a failure if we don't do them up. Besides, you have n't heard how he talks about you outside. He told father that you were 'the stuff' all right. He said that you were a born pitcher, and you'd make the college team sit up and take notice when you got there! Now will you be good, and stop grumbling?"

And Sid was so encouraged that the Princetonian insults the next day bounded off as lightly as hail from a coat of mail. The fiercer the dig, the more smilingly he received it, and the harder he worked to bring up his standard. In fact all the team worked hard, especially as the eventful day drew near. Pirates' caves, Indian encampments, and forts; even the beach itself became unimportant, mere child's play, in comparison to the coming contest, for the challenge had been sent to the "Stars" in due form, and the great game was set for the last Wednesday in July.

At this time the boys talked baseball, flies, three-baggers, home-runs, and fouls until their relatives were either wildly interested or fairly nauseated by the subject.

"Everything I eat lately tastes of baseball," Mr. Carroll declared laughingly, one evening just as they were finishing a dinner during which Carter and Sid

had talked "ball" without ceasing. "The soup was served during a 'home-run,' the roast was indeed a 'roast' of 'sore players' and 'butter-fingered fielders'; the salad was not one whit 'greener' than the batters; and now the dessert rests on 'stolen bases.' Boys, if I don't survive the coming contest, please see that my tombstone is suitably inscribed. How would 'A Victim of Baseball!' do; or better yet, this one — I found it in an old graveyard in Maine. I can alter it to suit the circumstances, you know.

" 'Behold and see, as you pass by!
As you are now, so once was I,
And as I am, so you will be,
If they talk you to death, as they have me!' "

"Why, father!" Mrs. Carroll exclaimed in shocked accents, although she was trying hard not to smile. "You want the 'S. I. G.'s' to win, don't you?"

"Sure thing!" he answered teasingly, "if they'll play ball and not talk about it everlastingly."

During practice Sidney Porter had laid great stress upon proper training for athletic sports of any kind.

"A fellow that's stuffed, or that's all out of sorts from eating trash, can't do good work in athletics, see?"

The team saw, and took his lecture very much to heart.

"Let's cut out pies, and cakes, and sweet things for the next few days," Carter suggested seriously. "If we were in a college crew, or were training for a race we'd hardly have anything at all to eat."

Mrs. Carroll noticed that both boys refused dessert for the rest of the time before the game and felt that they deserved some reward for their resolution.

"I think you'll be ready for a treat after the 'simple life' you've been leading lately," she began pleasantly, the day before the date set. "As you are the captain, Car, you may invite the team home for a lunch to-morrow, as soon as the game is over, that is if —"

"If I'll turn the ice-cream freezer," he finished the sentence for her. "It's a pity about Minnie, I must say, when I'm so busy. If she can't —"

"It is not Minnie's work," his mother interrupted his grumbling, quietly.

"We'll turn it," Sid volunteered eagerly. "We'll be glad to. And the fellows will be awfully pleased when they hear there's to be a spread afterwards. It will make them work all the harder."

"That's so," Carter agreed, heartily ashamed of the ungracious reception of his mother's plan. "Thank you, mother. I'll tell the boys. But make Minnie mix the stuff early, won't you? We've got to get it done so as to rest up for afternoon."

Mrs. Carroll smiled involuntarily at his important tone, yet she was almost as deeply interested in the coming contest as the boys themselves.

CHAPTER XI

"Stars" vs. *"S. I. G.'s"*

WEDNESDAY dawned clear and bright, and not too warm, an ideal day for sport of any kind. The game was set for two o'clock, but long before that time the grand stand was crowded with friends of the contesting teams, and boys and girls from all the surrounding schools. Railbirds were thick on the fence about the field. These were largely the members of other teams whom the "Stars" had already defeated, and who confidently expected the "S. I. G.'s" to join their ranks before the day was over.

The "I.'s" were the center of a group of girls gathered at the north end of the stand. They were all dressed in white and all carried triangular blue pennants with "S. I. G." in letters of white set on them. The "I.'s" had made the pennants themselves, working away busily during the previous week. They had their hearts set on victory for their side, and had composed several cheers which they had written out and sent to the rest of the girls, so that all were prepared to give them with vim and vigor, as soon as occasion arose. Ida, of course, was the leader, with Iva as admiring assistant.

They opened the ball with the promising couplet:

"We know how to bat: we can catch a fly:
We can take the game from you, and not half try!"

This was varied, later, by the "S. I. G." yell itself, given by a crowd of school boys:

"Rah! Rah! Rah! Sis! Boom! Bah!
Staten Island Giants! Ha! Ha! Ha!
Are we in it? Well, I guess!
'S. I. G.'s!' 'S. I. G.'s!' Yes! Yes! Yes!"

A group of "Star" girls, waving slender canes tied with bright red bows, promptly took up the gauntlet, and retorted with slangy forcefulness:

"Brag! Brag! Brag! Sixty cents a peck!
Any one who plays the 'Stars,' will get it in the ——
Yea–a–a, verily!"

But then "yells" both of the college and the base-ball variety are seldom classical. If they hit the mark either in cheers or jeers, it is all that can be expected of them.

Dixie, the "S. I. G.'s" mascot was wearing a huge bow of blue and white in honor of the occasion. As the team trotted into the field, he followed them as a matter of course. During practice he always settled down quietly on the bench beneath the blackboard, and on this day he started for his usual place, but just as he reached it, a terrific hissing and spitting arose, and without warning a black ball of furry fury sprang towards him. This reception was so unexpected that he turned involuntarily to run, while the "Stars" howled with glee, because the author of the hissing was their mascot, a huge black cat decorated with a bow of bright red ribbon.

But their cry changed its tone in short order. In an instant Dixie recovered from his surprise and turned to give battle. He was a spunky little animal and seizing the spitting, clawing beast by the scruff of the neck, he held on with a regular bulldog grip, in spite of all attempts to make him let go. There was wild excitement for a few moments, but before the cat was really injured, Arthur, the ingenious, appeared with some pepper which he sprinkled upon Dixie's nose. This caused him to relax his grip to sneeze, whereupon the cat, wise beyond his years, disappeared from the scene. He evidently believed that

> "He who fights and runs away
> Will live to fight another day."

At any rate he ran, and Dixie, after a protracted spasm of sneezing, settled down in his accustomed place and calmly went to sleep.

"That 's a good beginning all right," Johnny remarked with deep satisfaction. "Now if we can only do up the team as completely as Dixie did up its mascot, we 'll have something to crow over. They 've crowed over us so long, they deserve all they 'll get if — "

"Yes, if — " Sid interrupted gloomily. "It 's a pretty big 'if,' let me tell you."

"Never trouble trouble, till trouble troubles you," Arthur advised them solemnly, but only received a sulky "Oh! shut up!" for his pains.

In the toss-up the "S. I. G.'s" won and chose the field. In spite of Dixie's victory, the game started in badly

for the team. Either they lost their heads in this their first actual contest, or else the "Stars" overwhelmed them by their dash and surety. At all events the first inning showed a score of 5 to 0 in favor of their opponents. It was a most discouraging beginning. The "Stars" seemed fairly to fly from bag to bag. They hurled themselves along the ground to touch a base without the faintest regard apparently for life or limb, and certainly none for their clothing as they slid along the ground.

"They say we must all eat a peck of dirt sometime during our lives," Mrs. Porter remarked, laughingly; "but don't you think baseball players make it a bushel? There! look at that boy! He 's fairly swimming, face down, through the dust. But he 's made the base, though!"

"I wish the 'Stars' did n't have such long arms," Mrs. Carroll answered with an uneasy sigh. "That last runner seemed to touch third base with his fingers before his foot left second! 5 to 0! Our boys will never make up against such odds, I 'm afraid. It will take all the heart out of them right at the start. Just listen! The 'Stars' feel sure of victory already!"

The ladies looked towards a group of "Star" partisans at the southern end of the stand. One of their number, a thin, long-legged fellow, was acting as conductor of the vocalists. His arms were swinging violently and he was putting through such contortions of body and face that it seemed as though he were trying to turn himself inside out, but the result of his efforts was certainly vigorously clamorous.

"One we win! Two we win! Three we win some more!
By the ninth inning the other side feels sore!"

To which the "S. I. G." followers promptly retorted,

"Keep cool! Don't play the fool!
Wait for the finish is a pretty good rule.
The 'S. I. G.'s' 'll begin in a minute!
Then where'll the 'Stars' be? They won't be in it!"

But Mrs. Carroll was wrong in her doleful prophecy, much to her own satisfaction. Either such unwonted success in the first inning went to the heads of the "Stars" and made them over-confident, or else the heavy handicap of 5 to 0 put the "S. I. G.'s" on their mettle; at any rate, their score crept up slowly but surely during the next few innings, two runs, one run, and two runs again, until at the end of the fifth inning the score was tied, 6 to 6.

There were no runs scored in the next two innings, although it was during an exciting point of the seventh that one of the "Stars" took third base on a foul and tried to bring in a run without going back to second base.

The grand stand, even the "Star" adherents themselves recognized the error, but the umpire was one of those "know-it-alls" who, after declaring the player safe, lacked the good sense, or the courage, to acknowledge his mistake. The play came to a standstill while a heated argument ensued, and continued until the "S. I. G.'s" threatened positively to withdraw from the game then and there, unless the matter were adjusted fairly. This brought the umpire to terms; he yielded

the point, declared the score still a tie, and the play proceeded.

During the eighth inning, the "Stars" brought in two runs, and Johnny Porter scored one for the "S. I. G.'s." In the ninth inning, the "Stars" were struck out in rapid succession, and with a score of 8 to 7, Carter went to bat, the bases full and two men out!

The excitement was intense. The girls forgot to wave canes or pennants, and even the cheers were suspended as the spectators leaned forward, in breathless interest. Mrs. Carroll knew enough about the game to understand that on the team's captain rested the result of the contest. If he failed to score, defeat for the "S. I. G.'s" would follow. During the next ten minutes she never once took her eyes from her boy. Perhaps he felt the intensity of her gaze, or perhaps he instinctively realized her interest, for he looked towards her with a mischievous smile and threw up his arm in gay greeting.

"Go it, Car!" "It 's up to you!" "Give 'em a run for their money!" "Last chance for our white alley!" were some of the encouraging admonitions shouted out to him by his friends, while the "Star" clique began in a tantalizing sing-song: "The batter 's rattled! The batter 's rattled!"

"He is, is he?" Carter muttered with a grim smile. "We 'll see whether he is, or not! He 'll make you rattled before he gets through with you!"

And fortunately he was one of those players who are not easily "rattled": at a critical juncture like this he was much more apt to rise to the occasion and play

extra well. He glanced again towards the grand stand and smiled in anything but a nervous manner. Taking off his cap he dusted the home-plate with vigorous whacks. When he returned the cap to his head, without even a pretense at shaking it, his mother uttered an involuntary "Oh!" of dismay. After this bit of house-cleaning, he gripped his bat firmly, and tapped it several times upon the plate, winking aggravatingly at the catcher as he did so.

The spectators watched every motion of the play that followed, while the umpire's monotonous: "Ball — one! Ball — two! Ball — three!" rang out.

"Oh! I wish he 'd get his base on balls," Ida whispered excitedly. "I 'm afraid he 'll strike out, and there 's so much depending on him."

"They won't strike Carter out!" Iva replied, loyally, still in a subdued whisper as though fearful of disturbing the batter. But almost as she said the words the umpire's "Strike — two!" reached them.

"It 's all up for us!" Arthur mumbled, shaking his head dolefully.

"You old croaker!" It was Johnny who answered him. "There! look at that, and croak if you dare!"

"That" was a ball which the batter had just sent crashing towards the extreme limit of the field; not a fly, but a liner, one of those balls that are almost impossible to catch. It passed the fielders easily, and even after it struck the ground it bounded on and on. Carter and the three men on bases followed suit, sprinting from bag to bag like the wind, hard-earned victory well within

their grasp. At second, a glance assured Carter that two men were safe, if he needed assurance other than the jubilant chorus of "'S. I. G.'s'! Rah! Rah! Rah!" followed by a long-drawn "Yea–a–a! Yea–a–a! Yea–a–a! 'Stars!'" for the losers. With apparent indifference which must have been hard to maintain in the face of the enthusiastic mob awaiting him, he sauntered off the field. At the north end of the grand stand the blue and white pennants were dancing about frantically, while even in the center where the adults had congregated, a mass of waving hats and handkerchiefs attested to the excitement which a close game produces.

While the boys gathered about their captain, all elated over their victory, Johnny Porter's small cousin climbed up to the blackboard and triumphantly posted the score in figures of colossal size.

"Stars" 8
"S. I. G.'s" 9

"He said we would and we did! He said we would and we did!" Johnny declared over and over.

"Who said what?" Carter asked finally, not so much because he wanted to know as because he wanted to shut Johnny up.

"Uncle Sid! He knew we 'd win! I wish he had been here to-day!"

"He did n't talk that way to us," Arthur remarked in complaining tones.

"Of course he did n't!" Johnny explained volubly.

"Think he wanted to give us the swell-head? That 's the worst thing that can happen to a team, he says: it queers them right from the start."

"That 's so," Carter agreed thoughtfully. "That first five was too much for the 'Stars': it made them too cock-sure. Besides, they 've won every game they 've played this summer except this. We 'll have to watch out now, when we play any other teams, or this will do the same thing for us, and don't you forget it!"

News of the promised treat for the "S. I. G.'s" had leaked out in some way; possibly the members of the team had themselves been the carrier-pigeons. A strong bodyguard of partisans accompanied them to the Carrolls' gate and showed every evidence of willingness to go further if urged, but they were not urged. Mrs. Carroll had foreseen just this contingency and had wisely limited the spread to the team itself.

She had planned to surprise the boys by inviting Mrs. Harper to join them in the clebration if she felt equal to the exertion. Mrs. Harper accepted for the party, but stayed away from the field. She knew that she would hear the game discussed from first to last, and she was not strong enough to go to both places.

As soon as the game was over, Mrs. Carroll hurried to the Harpers' to help the invalid across the street.

"They 've won! They 've won!" Mrs. Harper cried joyfully as soon as she caught sight of her friend's face. "Oh! I 'm so glad! I 'm all ready. Wait just a moment though; I have a present for Dixie Doodle."

The present proved to be a bright-colored harness

with tiny bells on it. She had knitted it herself. She had grown very fond of the small dog: his antics amused her. She said that he did her more good than medicine.

Dixie was equally fond of her, but he failed to show any keen appreciation of his present. After tugging in vain in his efforts to tear the harness off — it was just out of reach of his paws — he retired under the big couch in the library and sulked; but when the boys came tramping in, joyous and hungry, he forgot his grievance, forgot even the obnoxious bells, and rushed out to greet them, prancing about from one to the other as though he wanted to congratulate them on their victory.

Mrs. Harper was also anxious to congratulate them. She stood, flushed and smiling, awaiting them with almost girlish eagerness, and it was good to see the manly way in which each lad went up to her and gently shook the outstretched hand.

While the boys were upstairs cleaning up after the fray, the doorbell rang. Carter peered over the banisters anxiously, fearing some interruption to the promised treat. When his mother opened the door, he went back to the boys with a wry face.

"Just our luck! It 's Mrs. Walton," he said in a disgusted whisper. "I do hope mother won't ask her in."

"So do I!" came the unanimous reply.

Mrs. Walton was one of those women who persistently rub boys the wrong way, and they disliked her accordingly. Dixie Doodle seemed to have a special grudge against her also. He invariably greeted her with brist-

ling back and low angry growls, and as she both feared and detested dogs, his reception added to her dislike. When Carter peered over the banisters a second time, the small dog was advancing towards the lady, emitting a series of snappy little barks.

"Dickey Bird!" Mrs. Carroll admonished him sharply; then she greeted the unexpected guest and invited her to come in.

"The team are having a little party," she explained brightly, "to celebrate their victory, you know. Won't you join us?"

"Say no! Say no!" the boys muttered above-stairs, as they hung over the banisters anxiously awaiting her reply. Her first words dashed their hopes.

"As long as you insist I might as well," she replied somewhat ungraciously: "but I don't believe in spoiling boys in this way. You know my views on that subject, Mrs. Carroll. If you 'll call off this ugly little animal, I 'll come in. How do you do, Mrs. Harper? I certainly did not expect to find you here."

"I have to help our boys celebrate their victory," Mrs. Harper answered smilingly. "That's what this party is for. It 's a jubilation."

"Humph! And what would you have done if they had n't won, I 'd like to know," Mrs. Walton inquired.

"Oh, then we 'd have it to bolster up their spirits for the next attempt," Mrs. Harper explained lightly. "I wonder what is keeping them upstairs so long," she began, but stopped suddenly and blushed rosy red as she realized why they stayed away.

"Carter!" Mrs. Carroll called at the foot of the stairs. "Are you ready? Minnie is putting the chocolate on the table now. Don't let it get cold."

At that the boys trooped downstairs and greeted the newcomer with the best grace they could muster. Then the party marched out to the dining-room. Carter carefully arranged a cushion at the back of Mrs. Harper's arm-chair, and placed a foot-stool for her, while Sid and Johnny helped her into her seat, for she was quite lame even on her good days, as she called them.

"Let Dixie Doodle come to the table, too," she urged laughingly. "He's the team's mascot, and he commenced the victory by vanquishing their representative, I hear, so he deserves to be in at the celebration, don't you, Dickey Bird?"

Mrs. Walton said nothing but her looks spoke volumes of contemptuous criticism. Mrs. Carroll understood this and hesitated, uncertain what to do, until the boys joined with Mrs. Harper in begging to have the small dog with them; then she pulled up Carter's old high-chair still kept ready for infant visitors, and Dixie jumped into it with joyful readiness. Like old Paula, the organ-grinder, he too "lika da eats!" But his joy was dampened somewhat when his master left his place and pinned a large napkin about his neck. It was bad enough to be strapped up in elusive, jingling bells without being smothered in a small-sized sheet! He started to jump down in disgust, but Mrs. Harper's soft white hand restrained him.

"He's such a lovable little fellow," she said, as she

patted the smooth brown head. "He knows everything you say, almost."

"He has good table manners, too," Mrs. Carroll added mischievously. "He never teases or helps himself to anything. He sets a splendid example to some people I know who shall be nameless." Carter and Sid nudged each other and the rest of the boys laughed as Mrs. Carroll spoke.

The spread began with hot chocolate and surprise sandwiches, as the boys called them because there were so many different kinds. If they tried a salad sandwich and decided that it could not be beaten, they were sure to strike a brown bread, cream cheese, and nut combination, or a chopped ham and olive one that threw the first favorite away into the shade. There were also some dainty finger rolls on the table, and Minnie had placed a plate of butter balls near them. Mrs. Harper helped herself to one of these balls and left it on her bread and butter plate which happened to be directly in front of Dixie. He eyed it intently, licking his chops as he did so, then he glanced away in the fashion dogs have when they are trying to pretend that they are not particularly interested; but suddenly there was a snap, and the butter ball had disappeared!

The boys were arguing hotly over one of the afternoon's plays, and Mrs. Walton and Mrs. Carroll were talking "jelly," so that Mrs. Harper was the only one who saw what had happened.

"Now you see it, and now you don't see it!" she whispered close to the little brown ear. "Butter ball!

butter ball! who's got the butter ball? You have!" she ended, poking him playfully in the ribs.

Dixie looked guilty and shifted about uneasily until she took pity upon him and untied the napkin, when he disappeared like a flash. Then she told the boys what he had done, thinking the joke too good to keep.

"He ought to be punished," Mrs. Carroll declared, "because he knows he has no right to touch anything on the table. I don't want him to get into bad habits. Catch him, Car, before he forgets what he's done."

But Carter searched in vain and finally returned to the table without the miscreant.

"It's the queerest thing!" he told the boys. "That little rascal has a hiding place somewhere. This is the third time he's disappeared and I have n't been able to find him. I've searched the house from cellar to attic, but it's no use. Wish I knew where he goes. Let's track him next time, Sid."

By this time the boys had reached the last inning of their treat. Towering pyramids of ice cream and generous wedges of maple and chocolate cake had succeeded the sandwiches and had been disposed of. Only a dish of candy and some crisp salted peanuts remained as evidences of the feast, and even these were rapidly disappearing.

"What's in that dish?" Carter demanded curiously, noticing for the first time that the silver baking dish which stood in the center of the table had not yet been uncovered.

Mrs. Carroll glanced inquiringly towards Mrs. Harper and received a gay nod in answer.

"If you are sure you have had enough," she said rising from her place and going to the side of the table where she could reach the dish, "we'll have our surprise party now."

"But what is it?" Carter began, much mystified.

"I don't know what it is myself," his mother replied. "My part of the treat is over: this part is Mrs. Harper's."

As she spoke she took off the cover and laid nine blue and white cords across the table cloth, one pointing towards each boy's plate.

"When I give the signal you may all pull the string," she ordered, laughing at their mystified faces; "only be careful — there may be breakables in the prize packages. Now then! On your mark! Get set! Go!"

Before the last word was out of her mouth, nine blue and white strings were hastily yet carefully pulled in, and nine mysterious packages covered with tissue paper, went gliding with rustling smoothness towards the boys. Johnny's reached home first, and a satisfied "Gee whiz! what a beauty!" announced his views on the subject. Other exclamations equally appreciative followed, as the rest unwrapped their gifts; and nine boyish faces were turned towards Mrs. Harper, all shining with genuine pleasure, even though the owners could not adequately express their gratitude.

The presents proved to be club pins, pennant-shaped, done in blue enamel, with the letters "S. I. G." in

silver in the center, surrounded by a wreath of silver leaves.

"You know what leaf it is in the wreath, don't you?" Mrs. Harper questioned, her brown eyes shining at the success of her surprise.

"No, ma'am!" they acknowledged, after earnest scrutiny.

"It's laurel," she announced triumphantly. "Laurel means victory you know; that's why I chose it. See what faith I had in the team!"

As the boys crowded around her in order to have her fasten on their pins for good luck, Mrs. Walton watched the pretty little scene with a queer look upon her hard face, but, for a wonder, she said nothing. Perhaps her views on the question of "spoiling" boys were being modified in spite of herself.

Just as they were leaving the dining-room Dixie Doodle trotted in, and going up to Mrs. Carroll, laid something that he was carrying at her feet, then stood by, his tail wagging proudly, his little nose twitching with excitement. Sid stooped to examine his find and discovered a small nest made of bits of soft paper. In it were four tiny, baby mice, curled up into little furry balls.

"You'll have to forgive him for the butter ball now," Mrs. Harper exclaimed, as she knelt down to pat the dog. "See, Missus, he's bringing you a peace-offering."

Dixie frisked about, all ready for a romp with the fascinating babies. The boys, too, were anxious to in-

spect them at closer range, but Mrs. Carroll called Minnie and handed the nest to her with a low-toned command. When Mr. Carroll heard of the affair that night at dinner, he laughed heartily as he asked:

"What will the little rascal find next, I wonder!"

CHAPTER XII

A Sale

On the day after their victory, the team lounged about unable to settle down to either work or play. They were, in reality, feeling the reaction after the excitement of the day before, but they did not know it.

"I hope we won't go all to pieces the next time we play," Carter remarked gloomily. "It's just about what we will do, though, if we don't watch out. We can't have another game until September. Sid and I will be away all next month, and the rest of the club, too, I suppose. You're going, are n't you, Johnny?"

Johnny nodded.

"We'll be up near old Mt. Washington by this time next Tuesday," he informed them. "I've planned to try the trail through Tuckerman's ravine, this year, if mother will let me. I've got a regular climber's kit. Wish you boys were going, too!"

"We'll be at Nantucket," Arthur volunteered. "Father's promised to let me go blue-fishing all I want. My uncle has a cat-boat there. Hope I'll catch something."

"You'll catch, all right," Sid said teasingly. "Just reason with the blues, as you do with us, Art. They'll jump for the hook, you see if they don't!"

"Funny, I don't think!" was all the rise Sid's jibe provoked.

"Guess we'll all be away during August," one of the other boys remarked. "Father says I can have the old barn when we get up to the farm. I intend to fix it up for a workshop. The carpenter in the village is to put in a regular bench for me. I'll beat you all hollow in shop, next year!"

"Shop!" Carter exclaimed suddenly. "Well, did you ever! We all need memory lessons! When are we going to sell our shop work? No use waiting until fall when there are all sorts of things doing. Besides, there are crowds of summer people on the Island right now. Almost everybody has company. I counted two dozen visitors in church last Sunday."

"Are you official score-keeper?" Arthur asked pointedly, but Carter refused to answer.

"Why not have it to-day?" Johnny demanded.

"Can't possibly," was the decisive reply. "We've got to tell everybody about it, or we won't have any buyers. But we can arrange it for Saturday afternoon, all right. We've got to: it's our last chance! We'll all have to get busy though, and advertise it. Don't forget, now. You'll have your work cut out after Saturday, Mr. Treasurer Armstrong," he added jokingly, to Sid. "Get your strong box ready for the proceeds. I think the sale will be lots of fun."

"So do I!" the rest agreed, and the matter was settled.

"Poky old day, is n't it?" Carter commented with a

yawn, a few moments later. "I'll stunt you to walk on the hedge, Sid!"

"You don't dare do it yourself," Sid replied tantalizingly. "You know you don't!"

"Bet I do!" Carter was roused by the taunt. "Just watch me."

"All right!" Sid drawled, "but I won't have to hold my breath until you succeed, will I? I don't want to die young."

Stung by the sarcasm, Carter scrambled to the top of the high fence which formed the dividing line between the Carrolls' garden and that of their neighbors' back of them. On the Grants' side of the fence, the barrier was enforced by a wide hedge at least eight feet high. It was really an unusually fine specimen of its kind, the pride of Mrs. Grant's heart. The boys had never been told not to walk upon it simply because the thought of their ever wanting to do such a thing had never occurred to either Mrs. Carroll or Mrs. Grant. Nevertheless, they had often longed to test its smooth, apparently unbroken top, to see whether it would really bear their weight.

Carter remembered that his mother was taking lunch with Mrs. Harper, but from his high perch on the fence he cast a wary glance at the windows of the other house before starting on his uncertain journey. Just as he was about to step over on to the hedge he stopped short and stood staring into the Grants' garden, his eyes glistening with surprise.

"Go on! go on!" Sid urged, not knowing the cause of his hesitation. "I dare you to do it! Pshaw! don't be a quitter!"

"Sh!" Carter whispered back peremptorily. "Whew! See who's here! Such a lay-out! Um-m-m! It makes my mouth water to look at it!"

"What?" "Where?" "Who is it?" "Here, let me see!"

Instantly the fence swarmed with the boys all gazing curiously into the other garden. There was silence for a moment while they took in the sight before them, then a chorus of exclamations arose.

"Ah-h-h-h!"

It was indeed a tempting vision upon which they gazed, so near and yet so far. Two long tables covered with fresh white tissue-paper cloths stood on the lawn beneath them, each table carefully draped with a large piece of mosquito netting, and one of them further hidden under sheets of wrapping paper. The one nearest the hedge held glasses of jelly, jars of pickles and preserves, bottles of catsups and chili sauce, and even small pots of Boston baked beans all luscious and brown on top, with a bit of crisp salt pork forming a delectable mountain in the middle. The other table whose paper covering they cautiously pushed off with a long branch, bore a still more tempting burden, — cakes of all kinds, cookies, doughnuts, and pretty little heart and diamond shaped dainties iced in pink, white, or green; wedges of gingerbread and loaves of nut and spice cake; large layer cakes with maple and nuts, or chocolate and marshmallows for decoration — all evidently "home-made." There was also a dish of fudge and one of salted nuts. No wonder the row on the fence stood in fascinated silence.

"And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew," until Johnny cleared up the mystery.

"There's nobody home at the Grants'," he declared, breaking the silence at last. "They've all gone over to Hoboken to meet their cousins from England."

"How do you know?" Carter questioned eagerly.

"Because I do," Johnny persisted positively. "I was there on an errand for mother when the telegram came. They were not expecting their cousins until to-morrow, but they'd left word at the dock to be notified as soon as the steamer reached Quarantine. I carried over those two jars of citron preserves there at the end of the table. See them? It's a dream, I can tell you, that citron! I like it better than candied pineapple."

"Queer what they are going to do with all this, though," Sid said, in wondering tones. "It don't look like a luncheon, or even a lawn party, does it?"

"I know what it's for," Carter declared suddenly. "I heard Mrs. Grant speak to mother about it last week. It's for a sale,— a fair, you know. The girls begged all those things from the neighbors. See that plate of doughnuts? We smelt them frying this very morning, but we could n't find them anywhere, could we, Sid?"

"Nope!" Sid replied shortly.

"That's one of our cook's cakes, I know," Arthur pointed to a large loaf of fruit cake edged with halves of walnuts.

"Ho! English walnuts!" Sid commented teasingly; "pretty good for the 'I.'s!'"

"It's pretty good for anybody, let me tell you," Arthur

asserted in aggressive expectation of a denial. "I guess I ought to know."

"Don't get excited, Art," Sid advised pacifically. "That cake looks good enough to eat!"

"I think this thing's a snap," Arthur went on, complainingly. "Why can't we beg a lot of stuff and have a sale? It would give our treasurer something to do."

"You seem to be worried about 'our treasurer,'" Sid flashed back promptly. He was not aggressive but he and Arthur often wrangled. The latter was really a manly boy, and good at heart, but he had the unfortunate knack of getting on his friends' nerves, even when he was proposing the most sensible measures. As the other boys declared: "It is n't what Art says, but the way he says it!"

"The money won't be theirs, Art," Carter explained. "They are going to give it to the 'Sunshine Society.'"

"What's the 'Sunshine Society'?" several voices demanded.

"Oh, it's a club that makes a business of finding out what sick people, — the 'shut-ins,' you know — want, then they try to get it for them. People ask for the queerest things sometimes, and they usually get them, too, if the Society can manage it. I had to take a cake over to the club for mother, last month, and the secretary of the 'Sunshine Society' was there telling the ladies all about it. What do you think two people wrote to them for, one time? You'd never guess! Field glasses!"

"Field glasses?" the rest repeated in astonishment.

"Yes, sir! The Society advertised the request and

six pairs of glasses were sent in; good ones, too, the secretary said. Just for fun she wrote to the two people, when she sent the glasses, and asked why they wanted them. One answer came from a crippled woman who had to stay on a couch all day. She said that her sister raised turkeys, and if she had the glasses she could keep watch when they tried to stray off. You know they do that all the time."

"And what did the other woman want with them?" Johnny asked, while the rest listened with interest.

"The other was an old colored man who was so lame from rheumatism he could n't work. He said that he had always been 'powerful' fond of baseball, and that if he had the field glasses he could climb on his woodshed roof and see the games in a park near his home."

"Hurrah for the old darky!" Sid ejaculated admiringly. "That shows good sense on his part, I think."

"But he might have put in his time better than watching baseball games, it seems to me," Arthur objected, just for the pleasure of disagreeing with Sid.

"Look here, Art!" Sid was in earnest now: his dark eyes flashed angrily. "Are you going to keep this up? If so, I hope you 'll see Nantucket even sooner than you expect to."

"Art 's not feeling first-rate to-day," Johnny remarked mildly. "He 'd better go to bed and get out with the other foot. Perhaps the run he did n't make yesterday, tired him all out."

This thrust from Johnny the peaceable was so unusual that even Arthur joined in the laugh that greeted

it, and after that the boy really made an effort to throw off his ill-humor.

"It seems a pity all those things have to lie there and spoil, does n't it?" Carter remarked thoughtfully. "They ought to be sold while they 're perfectly fresh."

"Guess that 's what the girls intended to do," Johnny agreed, "until the telegram came. They must have forgotten all about them, because they scarcely had time to make the next ferry. They started out on a run, I know. Of course, they would n't want to miss seeing their cousins' steamer dock."

"I don't see how they can get back from Hoboken early enough to have a sale," Sid ventured, tentatively. "It takes a steamer longer than you think to get up the river and into her pier."

"Sid means that the things ought to be sold now," one of the others declared frankly; "and I think so too. That 'Sunshine Society' must be a mighty good thing, and they need all the money they can get. It 's a shame to waste a cent."

"Probably the 'I. 's' would n't care who sells the things as long as they get the money," was Johnny's contribution to the turning tide. "I should think they 'd be glad to have the work done for them."

"So should I," several voices chorused, but Carter recalled Ida's snapping black eyes and decisive ways, and held his peace. Like the Scotchman, he had his "douts"! Besides he was the nearest neighbor and would see more of the girls than the others.

"Are you sure the Grants are all away?" Sid asked cautiously.

"Yep!" Johnny's response was positive. "Saw them go. They must be on the ferry by this time. Their Sarah 's out, too — it 's Thursday, you know."

"Where 's Mr. Buttinsky?" Sid persisted. Vivid recollections of former frays gave an anxious ring to his voice.

"He 's tied under the back piazza," Johnny answered; "so he won't he able to assist us."

The boys smiled involuntarily. At some time or other they had most of them had the benefit of the "assistance" mentioned by Johnny. Their interest in the goat was one which distance enhanced most decidedly.

"We have n't a thing to do all day to-day," Johnny went on in casual tones: "we might as well help the girls as not."

"But what if they don't like what we 've done, what then?" Arthur inquired anxiously.

"Guess they can't help themselves," Sid replied with a shrug of indifference. "But they ought to be grateful to us, I think, for taking such an interest."

Carter's account of the "Sunshine Society" had appealed mightily to the boys and undoubtedly part of their enthusiasm arose from their interest in its work. But the delicacies spread out so temptingly before them appealed even more mightily. They were possessed with an almost irresistible desire to handle the things. Besides, it really seemed a pity to defer the sale: some

of the articles would lose their first freshness. By clever argument they tried to convince themselves that they owed it to the "I.'s" as well as to the Society, to conduct the sale in their absence; and they almost succeeded — but not quite!

One by one they vaulted over the intervening hedge. This first step taken, the rest seemed easy, and a few moments later they were bustling about like a hive of bees. Soon they became so interested in their novel undertaking that they completely forgot that they were interlopers, and that their services had not been requested.

After some argument they decided that the empty lot next to one of the churches (not their own) would be the best place from a business point of view. It was some distance away, but was on one of the main streets not far from the stores. Also it was not a block frequented by people of their neighborhood, neither was it on the direct route from the ferry. These advantages were not mentioned openly, but they entered largely into the choice of the site.

Just as this matter was decided, Jim drove by with a friendly flourish of his whip towards the boys. A bright idea occurred to Carter and he ran shouting after him.

"Hey, there! Jim! Oh, Jim! Wait a minute!"

Jim obligingly pulled up and Carter preferred his modest request.

"Please help us get this stuff over to the lot next to the church, won't you? We 're in an awful hurry."

The young man hesitated. He was in a hurry too,

but on the other hand it was Carter Carroll who was asking the favor and Minnie lived with the Carrolls.

"I have n't much time to spare this morning," he began regretfully, but Carter interrupted him.

"It won't take long with all of us to do it," he assured him, pointing to the crowd of boys waiting near the tables. "We 'll do the loading and unloading: it 's just getting the things over to the lot that bothers us. Thank you, Jim, ever so much."

The boys were as good as their word. The things were all in order in the place chosen for the sale in less than half an hour, and Jim drove away with the pleased feeling that in helping Carter he had commended himself to Minnie. He learned differently later, when his angry sweetheart championed the girls' cause.

Some of the boys set to work to arrange their toothsome stock as attractively as possible, while others prepared the advertisements, and soon had several posters printed with blue pencil, ready for the fence nearest the street. Meanwhile Carter, cap in hand and best company manners on, presented himself at the door of the Sunday School through which several ladies had passed, and asked to see the lady in charge. When she presented herself, he explained his errand in such an engaging way that the ladies commented on it afterwards: "Such perfect manners!" "A gentleman, every inch of him!"

"We are holding a sale in the lot next door," he explained smilingly: "just our club of boys, you know;

and we thought you would like to see the things we 're going to sell before they 're all picked over."

"Why, that 's good of you," the lady answered, smilingly. She was a big, motherly looking woman who had boys of her own. "What are you selling? Flowers? It 's not a good season for them just now, I 'm afraid. We all have too many in our own gardens."

"Yes, ma'am, I know, but it 's a good season for our line," was the prompt response. "You see when ladies want to go to the beaches and to Coney Island, they 're always glad to be able to buy home-made cakes and jellies and things. And people on Staten Island have so much company in beach season, don't you think so?"

"Home-made?" the lady echoed. "We 'll surely have to see your things if that 's the case. Why, I could n't get a bit of baking done to-day because I had to come to this meeting. There 'll be another meeting later: all the Sunday School teachers to talk picnic. If your sale is really home-made things, as you say, you ought to dispose of them in a hurry. I 'll tell the rest of the Auxiliary ladies, and we 'll come over to take a peep before the other meeting begins."

Carter thanked her, and hurried back. When he reached the tables he found that everything was in order, and several large advertisements printed on sheets of wrapping paper decorated the fence-posts and even the trees on the pavement.

SALE TO-DAY!

HOME-MADE GOOD THINGS!
PRICES REASONABLE!

COME AND BUY AND HELP A GOOD CAUSE!
COME EARLY AND AVOID THE RUSH!

FOR SALE — PICKLES, PRESERVES, JELLIES,
CAKES, PIES, BAKED BEANS,
ROLLS AND BISCUIT,
FUDGE AND SALTED NUTS.

WHY BAKE WHEN YOU CAN BUY?

The boys found that everything had been well planned by the "I.'s." A box beneath one of the tables contained wrapping paper, another string, and, best of all, each article for sale had a price distinctly marked upon a slip of paper and fastened to it. This took the heaviest burden from their minds: they would have found it hard to set the proper prices on the things.

Just as the finishing touches were put to the tables, the side door of the church opened and a stream of ladies poured out, and, thanks to Carter's foresight, headed straight for the waiting salesmen. They swarmed about the tables, examining and discussing the articles, and "talking a blue streak," as Arthur expressed it afterwards.

"Are you sure everything 's home-made?"

"What 's the sale for?"

"What put such an idea into your heads?"

"Where did you get such lovely things?"

The boys answered the questions as well as they could, and praised their wares with true business volubility.

"H 'm! sixty cents!" one lady commented, looking longingly at the Boynton fruit-cake. "That seems awful high for such a small loaf, but I suppose it 's not so much with eggs and butter at the price they are, to say nothing of a fuss in the kitchen every time you ask for extra baking. You could n't sell it any cheaper, could you?" she ventured insinuatingly.

"No, ma'am," Carter answered in his best manner. "The prices are as fixed as the laws of the Medes and Persians."

"Oh!" the lady exclaimed, not having the faintest idea as to who the Medes and Persians were, and fearing to display her ignorance. "I see! Well, I 'll take it."

When the boys first examined the articles, the prices had almost taken their breath away, but they had wisely resolved to stick to them, and they soon found that home-made dainties sell whether times are hard or not. In fact they learned that most of their customers considered themselves fortunate in having such a chance.

Several of the large cakes were sold in halves, and the cutting, with two critical customers watching every move, was a nerve-racking operation, but the boys went at it in too serious a manner to allow of any objections. By this time they had come to consider it their own

sale, whose proceeds were also to be theirs to present to the "Sunshine Society."

Sid almost met his Waterloo in a thin, sharp-faced seeker after a mocha cake.

"Who made it, do you know?" the lady demanded. "Very few people can make a real mocha tart properly."

Sid did not know, and none of the other boys "remembered," and the lady viewed them suspiciously for a moment, but finally compromised by calmly cutting out a wedge of the cake as a sample. It evidently proved satisfactory even without the maker's name, because she smacked her lips appreciatively and departed with her purchase held as though it were labeled: "Glass. This side up with care!"

The boys worked away with a will. Only once was one of them caught napping, and that was when Carter asked a question of Johnny and failed to obtain any answer.

"Did you, Johnny?" he repeated, this time receiving an indistinct "M-m-m" by way of reply. He glanced suspiciously towards the boy and saw that he was standing directly back of the fudge dish.

"None of that!" he warned sharply. "This is a business venture, remember, and we 've got to turn in as much as we possibly can. You ought to hear my mother tell of a big concert she went to, in New York. It was for some charity, and the tickets were two dollars each. Mother says they had a good program, then they served light refreshments and presented each lady with a long-stemmed rose."

"Well?" Johnny asked defiantly.

"Oh, nothing! only the hall was crowded with people and what do you think they sent to the charity? Exactly twenty-seven dollars! No long-stemmed roses here, please, nor light-fingered salesmen either," he ended decisively. "We 'll put that fudge in the center of the table and —"

"No, don't," Sid interrupted; "let 's buy it ourselves. There 's a lot of it, and it 's only twenty-five cents. It 's good, too."

"How do you know?" Carter inquired suspiciously.

"It looks good," Sid corrected himself. "I 'm hungry. It 's no joke to stand over all this and not get any of it. There comes the crowd from the other meeting. Say, Johnny, don't you sell those two glasses of currant jelly, do you hear? I want those for mother. She could n't make any this year, and she just loves it. You mark them sold. I 'll get you the fifty cents as soon as we reach home. Don't forget, now."

This started the rest, and it ended by the management itself purchasing quite a stock of home favorites, rolls and doughnuts, jellies and pickles. Possibly they intended to use the things as peace-offerings, if necessary. Several automobiles on their way to Philadelphia and the various Jersey coast resorts also stopped, their owners glad to provide for feasts *en route*. By three o'clock everything was sold.

The boys had worked hard, not one of them deserting even at lunch time: in fact that was their busiest hour. As they took up the homeward march, swinging the

light tables between them, the cash box which Sid carried held a considerable sum, a sum that tallied exactly with the amount of the slips which had all been saved.

Strange to say each boy seemed to remember some pressing engagement as soon as the Carrolls' was reached. Only their desire to help the good work of the "I.'s" had enabled them to postpone their duties as long as they had. For once in his life Johnny seemed really anxious to get to the dentist's. But before they made good their escape Mrs. Carroll came to her window and spoke to them.

"Where have you been, boys?" she demanded eagerly. "I 've tried several times to find you because I wanted you to help the 'I.'s.' Poor girls! they had everything ready for a lawn sale this afternoon, and some one has stolen all their goodies. They had to go over to meet their cousins from England this morning. They made Sarah promise to take the things into the house but she forgot it. They 're dreadfully disappointed because they 've worked hard for a week, collecting the things."

"Are their cousins here now?" Carter inquired anxiously.

"No! they are going West first. That 's why the girls hurried over to see them. They are to stop here on their return, though. Now hurry and see what you can do for them. It 's a shame! I suppose it 's only some joke, but it 's a pretty earnest matter for the girls."

The boys shifted about uneasily, each waiting for the other to speak. The arguments they had used to persuade themselves sounded flat somehow or other. Some-

thing in their attitudes, or in their unusual silence, finally struck Mrs. Carroll as ominous. She studied the little group intently for a moment.

"So you are the guilty ones!" she said.

Instantly there arose a storm of denials and explanations.

"Don't all speak at once, please," she commanded sternly. "Carter, what have you done? Tell me!"

"Why, the girls had to go to town, you know, and the things were all ready, and — and we thought they 'd spoil if they had to wait until to-morrow, some of them, at least, so we — we —"

"Well?" Mrs. Carroll leaned forward anxiously, never taking her eyes from her boy's face. It hurt her to have him and his friends guilty of an unmanly action. She never objected to fun, but this was going too far. "Well?" she demanded again, her tone sharp from dread of what he might say.

"So we sold the things for them," he added slowly.

"Oh!" the exclamation was one of relief: it was not as bad as she had feared at first.

"How could you disappoint them so?" she asked earnestly. "After all their work, too."

"They ought to be mighty glad to have it done for them," Arthur explained virtuously. "We 've wasted most of the morning and part of the afternoon just to help them out. We worked harder than we expect to do at our own sale on Saturday."

"And it don't matter who sells the things as long as they 're sold, you know," Johnny assured her earnestly.

"We knew they wanted the money for the 'Sunshine Society,' and we 've got exactly the amount on the slips, have n't we, Sid? O. K. to a penny!"

"Yes, we have, Mrs. Carroll," Sid confirmed Johnny's statement.

"I 'm glad of that," Mrs. Carroll remarked quietly. "You may carry the money over to them and explain why you took charge of the sale."

"But — but —" Carter fairly stammered in his eagerness, "we thought you'd do that, now that you know why we — we helped them out. They won't care, as long as they get the money. Will you, mother?"

"All right," she replied with unexpected willingness. She knew that the culprits ought to take their medicine, but she did not think it wise to administer the dose just then. "I'll tell them that you knew they did n't care about the sale except to get the money. I hope they'll understand. Bring the box to me, Sid, and if you and Carter are hungry you'll find peaches in the basket, and some coffee cake in the kitchen. There is plenty of milk in the refrigerator, if you care to have it. Minnie 's out, so you'll have to wait upon yourselves."

With that she shut the window, a somewhat grim smile upon her face.

"Say," one of the boys remarked admiringly, "your mother 's all right, Car! I thought she was going to give us Hail Columbia. Mine would have, I know; she's not so easy."

But Carter was silent. He knew his mother better than the speaker, and he had detected a twinkle in her

eyes while the boys were stating their views upon the selling question, which meant mischief. He knew that she was very fond of the "I.'s" and their friends. He also knew that she despised deceit; but he said nothing of his fears to the others. After the money had been handed over, he and Sid made a raid upon the pantry and the refrigerator, then departed for the school courts. The "I.'s" had a court of their own so that there was no danger of encountering them there; for in spite of their good intentions, neither of the boys cared, just then, to meet the girls. It was one thing to explain their action satisfactorily to themselves, but to explain it to the girls — well, that was another story!

CHAPTER XIII

Mrs. Harper's Gift

THE "S. I. G.'s" spent Friday in preparing for their own sale which was to be held in the tent on Saturday at three o'clock. They posted notices on the fence, and telephoned every one they knew whom there was the slightest hope of interesting. In addition to this, nine boys talked "sale" until the whole neighborhood was aware of the proposed function.

"Oh, yes! I'll come over in time," Mr. Carroll promised. "Saturday's a half holiday, anyway. You boys must be expert salesmen by this time. Your mother tells me you conducted a sale yesterday, too. It's a pity you won't have a chance to — what's the matter, dear?" he inquired abruptly, turning to his wife.

"Do you think it is going to rain?" she asked pointedly.

"I — why — oh! I see! No, I think it will be fair," he replied, and hastily changed the subject.

Before eight o'clock the next morning the boys were busily at work cleaning out their headquarters, and sweeping and dusting the few articles of furniture it contained, and by eleven o'clock everything was in order. A cosy-corner had been arranged at the back of the tent. It looked very inviting with its gay striped cover and many colored pillows. A number of chairs

were placed about the entrance to the tent, and their handiwork was arranged on a long table through the middle, leaving room for prospective purchasers to walk about and examine the articles for sale. This arrangement seemed a better one than tables at the sides of the tent. The articles made a very good showing. Each was carefully ticketed to announce both its maker and its price. Profiting by their experience at the other sale they had plenty of wrapping paper and string in readiness.

"Don't it look great, though?" Johnny asked enthusiastically, as the boys stood in a group at the entrance, to view the general effect.

"That cosy-corner scheme of mine is a pretty good stunt," Carter said in self-congratulatory tones. "Nobody would believe it was just our old cot, would they? It makes the place look like a studio, I think."

"Yep!" was the general assent, until Arthur got his second wind.

"But you have to have pictures in a studio," he informed them largely, "or at least sculptured things."

"Oh! you don't say!" Sid commented laughingly. "You'd scarce expect one of your age, to be so very, very sage."

"Well, anyhow, a studio —" Arthur was beginning argumentatively, when Carter hummed lightly: "Has nothing to do with the case, tra-la! Look here, Art, a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, so call it anything you please." But Arthur kept quiet out of sheer disgust.

The boys lay about on the grass too eager for the afternoon's plan to start anything that morning. It was too hot for tennis, or so they said; and they did not care to begin a ball game for so short a time. While they were talking in a desultory way, the expressman drove up to the Harpers' and departed a few moments later with two steamer trunks and a large wardrobe trunk. The boys watched him in silence.

"I hope it will do her good," Sid said at last.

"So do I," the others answered quietly but fervently, for early the following week Mr. and Mrs. Harper were to sail for Germany, where the latter was to be treated by a famous doctor in the hope of regaining her health. The trip had been decided upon very suddenly.

"I wish we could give her something to remember us by," Carter said hesitatingly. "She's always been so interested in our club, and in everything we do."

"Why can't we?" Johnny asked, jumping up eagerly. "We are all fond of her, you know we are; and we're not ashamed of it either. Let's get her some sort of a keepsake."

"People mostly get flowers or fruit when they are starting on a trip abroad," Arthur suggested.

"Yes, and cushions marked 'Bon Voyage,'" Johnny added. His French education had not yet begun, and his pronunciation of the familiar good wish would have made a native stare in surprise.

"We don't want to get her fruit or flowers," Carter decided. "They're no good after a day or two. I'd rather give her something that would last."

"That's what I say, too," Sid agreed. "We might get her one of those cushions with Bon — whatever it is on it, or a book, perhaps, or — or — "

"She's fond of pets," Johnny interrupted. "I wonder if we could get her a little monkey like Peek-a-Boo."

"You're a little monkey," Carter remarked scornfully. "People who are going abroad don't care to drag pets about with them. Might as well give her a white elephant, and be done with it."

"I think a book's a nice present, just as Sid said," Arthur remarked, for once agreeing with Sid, "if we could only find out what kind of a book she cares for."

"Or we might get her a string of pearl beads or a ring, or something of that sort," one of the other boys suggested. "It depends on how much we have to spend for it."

"That's so," Sid agreed promptly. "Well, we've got just the same old two dollars we've had all along. The odd change went towards the balls, you remember. I suppose we can't use any of this afternoon's money, can we?"

"No!" Carter shook his head decidedly. "Anyway, we go early Monday morning, so we've got to get whatever we decide on to-day. That's the trouble, there's not much choice here on the Island."

As he spoke old Paula came to a halt in front of the gate, and little old Peek-a-Boo jumped up on the fence, bowing solemnly, cap in hand.

"Here's where we get 'Rock-a-Bye Baby' or some

other up-to-date musical number," Sid remarked with laughing sarcasm, when, to their surprise, the old fellow broke forth into one of the popular songs, and soon they were all jigging about singing "Harrigan — that's me!" at the top of their voices. No one would have thought that the mercury stood high in the tube if they judged by the scene at that moment.

Mrs. Harper was busily directing her maids as to the packing of bric-à-brac and books, but she stopped to listen to the boyish chorus.

"Bless their hearts!" she said softly. "I'll miss my nine tonics!"

After Paula's departure, the argument about the gift for Mrs. Harper was resumed, and the discussion was becoming decidedly warm when a young man strolled up the avenue, looking inquiringly from side to side. The instant he saw the tent, the boys, and the dog, he came to a halt, and placing the large square object he was carrying carefully upon the pavement, he leaned his arms upon the fence and grinned cheerfully.

"Hello, boys!" was the hearty greeting that followed the grin. He was a broad-shouldered, frank-faced young fellow, not much more than a boy himself.

"Hello!" came the reply, as they eyed the man and his burden curiously. Nine responsive grins accompanied the greeting.

"You're a great bunch," he vouchsafed with a big hearty laugh. "Don't you want your pictures taken to-day? Surprise your mothers, my lads: let 'em see how handsome you all are. I'd like to take you. One

of you may be President some day — never can tell, you know! How about it?"

"About being President, do you mean?" Carter asked, smiling broadly.

"No, sir! about the picture! I'll do a good one for you. None of your unfinished films for me! Not much! not if my name 's Jared Spearman, which it is, at your service. If your mothers don't care for the picture, have n't you got some right little, bright little girl that would like one?"

At that an idea flashed into Carter's mind. He spoke to the others in a whisper for a few minutes, then walked towards the fence.

"Look here," he began earnestly, "what will you charge to take us all in one picture? It will have to be a good one, though, or we don't want it."

"It'll be a good one or none at all," the man answered positively.

"But we've got to have it right away," Carter went on. "You see, it's for a present to a lady that's going away. And we're all going too, on Monday. Could you finish it off to-day, do you think? It's good and sunny."

"I tell you what I can do for you," the man explained, after a few moments' thought. "An old friend of mine has the photograph gallery in the village. He only does ping-pongs, so I don't interfere with his business, see? He'll let me finish off at his place, this afternoon, if I ask him, as long as it's a special case."

"But how much?" Carter asked eagerly.

"Twenty-five cents apiece," was the prompt response. "That's cheap for good work."

Nine boys became calculators on the lightning order (more or less), and nine hearts beat with the joyful certainty that they could bring him down to their limit, when the amount set was so near. And the young fellow gave in with hearty good nature when they explained that two dollars represented the sum of their worldly wealth as a club.

"All right! It's a go!" he agreed cheerfully as he arranged them in a group. "Look pleasant, now. We'll make this a picture as is a picture."

The boys stood up looking as stiff as tin soldiers. From their appearance they might possibly have smiled in the past, but they certainly never intended to do it again.

"Don't look as solemn as a funeral," he shouted finally, in genuine anger, after he had laughed and told funny stories until he was tired, while the boys only looked stiffer and more solemn than ever. "Limber up, I tell you! Limber up! Have you all got ramrods down your backs! Have n't you ever heard of the smile that won't come off? If I had a few of them now I'd glue them on all right."

At this, a sickly-looking ghost of a smile appeared on one or two faces, but disappeared almost as quickly as it came. The man stamped up and down furiously.

"Here! here! here! This won't do! It won't do, I tell you! I'm not going to take a picture of a gang of convicts about to be executed. Put some ginger into

it, can't you? The way you fellows look is enough to break my camera. I'll have to dangle a dolly, or have a little bird peep out, like they do for the babies."

While the man was scolding away, rubber bulb in hand, Arthur Boynton remembered a doughnut that he had hidden in his pocket when he got up to pose for the picture. As he felt for it and stealthily carried it to his mouth, it slipped from his grasp and rolled along the pavement. Dixie had watched its progress with unwavering gaze. Like a flash he pounced upon it. Instantly the boys became alive, alert, interested. Broad smiles appeared on each face as Dixie made short work of his treasure trove.

Suddenly there was a click from the camera, and the picture was taken!

"Now that's something like a picture!" the man exclaimed in satisfied tones. "Those were real live boys, not a row of broom-sticks with trousers on 'em. I guess I'll have to take the little brown dog too, for helping me out. He's in the other picture, but I'll make him one all by his little lonesome, and make you a present of it."

At the photographer's request Carter stepped up near the camera and snapped his fingers, and when the small dog looked up, alert and ready to spring towards him, there was another click, and he too was taken.

The man hurried away promising to bring back the picture before dark that evening, and the boys scattered to get lunch and dress for the afternoon. It was after one o'clock, as the posing had taken longer than they

realized. Lunch had been waiting for some time, but Mrs. Carroll saw what they were doing and refused to interfere by calling them. When the two rushed in as hungry as hunters, she was all ready for the afternoon, looking very pretty and dainty in a white embroidered linen gown, and a big white panama hat draped with a gay striped scarf which Sid's mother had sent from abroad.

"Hurry, boys," she admonished them, "or I'll be late. I expect some of the people here rather early, and that reminds me," she added carelessly. "I want you to ride down to Stapleton this afternoon."

They stared at her in speechless surprise for an instant. If she had said, "I want you to ride to Mars this afternoon," they could scarcely have received the request with greater astonishment.

"To Stapleton!" Carter ejaculated finally, when he had recovered sufficiently to speak at all. "Why, mother, we can't possibly go to Stapleton this afternoon."

"My watch is being regulated at the jeweler's there," Mrs. Carroll explained quietly, "and we start for the lakes so early on Monday there'll be no time to get it then. I cannot possibly do without it for a whole month, and I don't care to pay extra to have it expressed to me when it is not necessary."

"But it is necessary!" Carter burst forth emphatically. "My back tire's flat — it's got a big puncture in it; I'm not going to have it fixed until we come home. It would take over an hour to go all the way to Stapleton and back in the car, and even longer to walk it. I'm

sorry, mother." He spoke as though the matter were settled.

"What if it takes two hours?" his mother asked lightly. "You have the whole afternoon before you. Dinner will probably be a little later to-day, on account of the sale. I — oh! there come the girls now. I told them to be early. How do you do? Have you had your lunch?"

The "I.'s" and two of their girl friends fluttered in like gay butterflies, all laughing and talking at once. They kissed Mrs. Carroll and greeted Carter and Sid with the sweetest of little nods. Even Ida's was cordial, and the boys had rather dreaded their first meeting with her after Thursday's "helpfulness," but it seemed that their fears were without foundation.

"Here are your badges, girls."

Mrs. Carroll produced a small box as she spoke. It contained tiny bows of blue and white ribbon — the "S. I. G." colors — all ready to be fastened on with small safety pins. As she pinned one on each of the pretty gowns, she began giving them instructions which made Carter and Sid stare at her wildly, as though they doubted her sanity, or their own hearing.

"Try to make all the sales you can, and don't change any of the prices, either. Put all the money into the tin cash box, and also put the price slips in, so that the amount received will tally exactly with the amount of the slips. We must be business-like in anything of this sort, especially when we are working for others."

"Yes, indeed," Ida agreed positively. "We'll be very

careful about it, Mrs. Carroll. We're anxious to make as much as possible."

"And we're interested in it, too," Iva added, dimpling all over her rosy face, as she glanced shyly towards the boys.

"Wh-what are the girls going to do?" Carter stammered anxiously. A dim suspicion was trying to make itself felt, but it was so preposterous that he refused to listen to its warning.

"They are having a sale this afternoon," Mrs. Carroll answered, repressing a smile only by vigorous effort. "I thought you knew all about it."

"What, another?" Sid exclaimed. "They're rushing it. What is this one for? 'Sunshine Society' again, or 'Fresh Air Fund'?"

"This one is for a club they are interested in," was the noncommittal response.

"Oh!" Carter breathed a sigh of relief. "Come on, Sid, we've got to rush or the people will be here before we're dressed. Wish you luck, girls."

"Wait a moment, Car." Mrs. Carroll's voice was quiet, but decided. "You'll need the ticket for the watch, and the money to pay for it. Excuse me, girls. Go right out to the tent: I'll join you as soon as I get the boys off. And don't forget that the tea-table Carter made is to be marked 'Sold.' I've bought that myself. I'll give Ida the money as soon as I come out. I also want that book-rack of Sid's saved for his mother. I'll buy it for her."

"The tea-table Carter made!" "That book-rack of

Sid's!" Two boyish faces turned red, then white, then red again. They said not one word until the girls had left the room. The shock seemed to have deprived them of the powers of speech. Finally Carter broke forth into a perfect stream of objection.

"But we don't want any girls to help us! We're going to manage the thing ourselves. If we had wanted the girls we'd have asked them soon enough, you 'd better believe. I'll let them know it, too, before I — "

"Gently, my son!" his mother warned him. "The girls are not helping — they are in charge of the sale. What does it matter who sells the things as long as they are sold? You ought to be glad to have them willing to take all the bother off your shoulders. They thought the object was a good one — you know they are interested in the 'S. I. G.'s' because they like the members of the club so much — so they were willing to waste the afternoon for the sake of helping you out. You ought to be mighty glad to have it done for you. It does n't really matter who takes charge as long as the club receives the money."

The words she used sounded familiar: both boys knew where they had been used before, but oh! what a different ring they had now! Without a word they turned to leave the room. At the door, Mrs. Carroll's voice stopped them.

"This is the first time I have had to punish my son and his friend for an act that was both unkind and unmanly," she said slowly and earnestly; "I trust it will be the last."

The boys knew that the tables were turned, and hurried out to intercept the rest of the "S. I. G.'s." Their story was received with incredulity, anger, or amusement, according to the various natures of the listeners. After the matter was thoroughly discussed by the others, Arthur began and grumbled away mightily.

"It's an outrage, that's what it is! Why, it's stealing! Those are our things! We made them ourselves, and nobody has any right to touch them. If your mother thinks — " he stopped short as Carter and Sid both squared away belligerently before him, but Johnny intervened in time to prevent any further hostilities.

"One — two — three — four — Yes, sir! there's all eight of them there," he announced, laughing gleefully; "and Sid's mother would make the ninth if she were home. Mrs. Harper's her substitute I guess. Don't say 'your mother,' Art, say 'our mothers'! It's one on us and we deserve it, so there. We feel mean because we wanted to sell the things ourselves, and I bet the girls felt just as mean last Thursday. We are seeing it from their point of view now, that's all. It makes quite a difference, does n't it?"

The rest accepted this philosophical view of the case. Under the circumstances they felt it beneath their dignity to hang around near the tent so they tramped off to Stapleton in a body, secured the watch, indulged in an ice-cream soda all around, and tramped back again, their lacerated feelings so much soothed that they joined the girls with smiling faces instead of greeting them with scowls. They even listened to an account of the after-

noon's experiences with a pretty good grace. A cash box was presented by Ida with the assurance that its amount tallied exactly with the amount of the tickets. While they were talking the matter over they heard a long whistle from the direction of the street, and there stood the camera man leaning on the fence, surveying the scene with twinkling eyes.

"Did you finish the picture?" "Is it good?" "Are we all in it?" were some of the questions showered upon him as the boys hurried towards the fence, the girls following with unconcealed curiosity.

"It's a winner, all right!" the man promptly assured them. "See for yourselves. Ask the young ladies what they think about it; they're good judges."

With that he handed out two pictures, the first the one in which they were all watching Dixie as he sprang for the bit of doughnut; the second the one of Dixie alone. Both were unusually clear and well finished, and the likenesses were perfect. Both boys and girls swelled the chorus of appreciation, while the man studied the scene with an eye to business.

"Those your mothers?" he asked Johnny quietly, indicating the group of ladies gathered around Mrs. Carroll's new tea-table, drinking tea and eating crisp little cakes of Minnie's manufacture. Johnny nodded and the man approached the ladies. Without a word he handed them copies of the pictures, and in less than fifteen minutes had received a number of orders.

At first the boys started after him in alarm, not wishing to have him spoil their surprise, but they saw that

Mrs. Harper had left the group and was being escorted across the lawn by her husband and Mr. Carroll, so they let him alone. As he passed them again, on his way out, he showed them his order book.

"Ten orders, boys, with scarcely a word spoken. That's business! Remember that your goods will talk louder than your tongues, if they are up to the mark. Don't you forget that when you go into business. Good-bye! I've got to get back to the city, now: I'm about starved."

But Mrs. Carroll hurried up to the young man just as he was closing the gate, and urged him to take a cup of tea and some sandwiches before he left. He thanked her heartily and disposed of the lunch with an enjoyment that was very evident.

"I don't often get home-made things now," he told her laughingly. "I'm from the West, on a tramping trip for experience, during my vacation. Yes, I'm a college man," he added in answer to the look of astonishment in her face. "And this old friend," pointing to his camera, "pays the way. If you treat everybody as well as you have me, you must have a line of crosses on your fence posts to guide the hungry and weary! I'd like to put a good big one there myself, thank you. Good-bye."

Mrs. Carroll shook hands with him after receiving his promise to send the pictures by express to Mr. Carroll's office. That was deemed the safest method as so many of the ladies were to be away.

"Mrs. Harper leaves to-night instead of Monday, boys," she informed them, after the man had departed.

"If you wish to bid her good-bye you'll have to hurry. There comes the carriage for her now."

"But I thought she did n't sail until next week," Carter exclaimed in surprise.

"She does n't, but she's going to Boston first. Mr. Harper has business in that city, so they sail from there."

"Hurry, fellows," Carter called out peremptorily as he started on a run for the house. The rest followed and found him at the desk in the library. On the back of the picture he had written in a big round hand:

"From your fiends."

Nine boyish signatures were carefully placed below the inscription, then Dixie's paw was smeared with ink and pressed upon the paper, next to the words: "Dixie Doodle — His mark."

Mrs. Carroll came in just as Carter produced some fresh white tissue paper and was hunting for a piece of blue cord to carry out the "S. I. G.'s" color scheme.

"Better put an '*r*' in that last word, Car," she advised laughingly, pointing to the inscription. "It will make it more friendly."

Mrs. Harper received the gift with eyes brimming with tears.

"You could not possibly have chosen anything that would please me more," she said brokenly. "I shall keep the pictures with me all the time. They will tell me that my friends love me and are thinking of me, even though I am far away; and if I — when I come home I want you all to meet me."

They assured her, eagerly, that they would, and as she returned their hearty handclasps, stooping to kiss each frank, boyish face, not one of them resented the loving good-bye. Without a word, they watched the carriage until it disappeared around the turn in the avenue; then, still silent, they separated for the night.

CHAPTER XIV

A Tub Race and Its Consequences

THE Carrolls were to spend August at the lakes, as usual, and as they had to start early on Monday, the boys were hustling and bustling about long before seven o'clock. Carter was delighted to have Sid with him during his vacation trip, and this year the Grants were also going. Mrs. Grant really preferred to stay at home where she had things just as she wanted them, but the "I.'s" had teased and pleaded until she consented to tear herself away from her home comforts for the month of August.

"I much prefer my own airy piazzas, and my own bath," she explained to Mrs. Carroll resignedly; "but with two growing girls on my hands I suppose I must expect just this sort of thing. The only leaven in the prospect is that I will be with you," she added sincerely.

"Thank you," was Mrs. Carroll's gratified response. Her English neighbor was seldom demonstrative, so she appreciated the compliment all the more highly. "And don't worry over piazzas and bath tubs," she added. "There are splendid piazzas at the 'Good Times House,' with a magnificent view spread out before them; wooded mountains and green valleys, and the most glorious sunsets you ever saw. And besides the regular bath tubs, you have the whole lake, you know!"

The two ladies and all the grips went to the ferry in a carriage, while Mr. Carroll and Mr. Grant accompanied the "I.'s" and Carter and Sid on foot. The party which met at the ferry was a very jolly one, so jolly that it made the two men long to begin their vacations then and there.

"Don't catch all the fish, boys," Mr. Carroll admonished them at parting. "Leave a few bass and a pickerel or two for us, won't you?"

"We'll try, sir!" Sid answered laughingly, but Carter refused to commit himself.

They had reserved the drawing-room of the car for the trip, and had provided themselves with luncheon as the dinner stop was of only ten minutes' duration. They had a gay time all the way up, and enjoyed their picnic luncheon thoroughly. The sandwiches and cakes were delicious. Thermos bottles kept the coffee for the ladies hot, and the lemonade for the young people cold.

After they arrived at the tiny station surrounded by its ever green mountains that seemed threatening to close in upon it and demolish it, they had a drive of several miles, all up-hill, but the strong mountain horses made light work of the pull. The rest enjoyed the scenery but Mrs. Carroll was anxious about the fate of the trunks one of which was roped on at the extreme end of the mountain wagon.

"Your clothes are on the line all right," the driver assured her good-naturedly: "Don't you worry about 'em. See those knots? Best kind of clothespins!"

When they reached the lakes the boys found to their

delight that they had been assigned to the tent, the "I.'s" having the room originally reserved for them. It was a large tent set on a raised flooring, and proved to be arranged most comfortably. It stood not far from the end of the hotel piazza, even nearer the water than the house itself. They were too eager to get to the lake to do more than take a cursory view of it, however, so they tossed their grips inside and started for the dock; but Carter remembered just in time that he did not know the number of their boat and hurried into the office to consult the clerk.

On reaching the dock they found that the boat reserved for them was a new one that had been put in the water only a few weeks before. Sid was delighted with it but Carter regarded it in deep disgust.

"That thing!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Might as well try to row a barge as that! I wanted one of the steel boats."

"I know you did," his mother replied. She had followed the boys to the dock, anticipating just this dissatisfaction on Carter's part; "but they are more expensive — in fact almost twice as much. I know they are light but they tip easily. That was why I especially asked to have one of these reserved."

While she was speaking Sid sprang into the boat, untied the anchoring rope, and rowed a few strokes away.

"Come on, Car!" he urged. "It pulls as light as can be." But Carter ignored the invitation.

"I don't care to go on the lake at all," he remarked

with freezing dignity, "if I have to go in a flat-bottomed scow!" And putting his hands into his pockets, he tried to whistle indifferently.

"Very well," Mrs. Carroll answered gently, "if you feel that way about it you may go to the office and get another boat, but — "

"Goody!" Carter broke in joyfully. "Come on, Sid! I'm afraid all the steel boats will be snapped up if we don't hurry."

"Wait a moment until I finish," his mother restrained him quietly. "I was about to say that you may use the steel boat for rowing — you handle your oars very well — but you can only row on Little Twin. No going through the channel into Big Twin and no fishing, if you choose a round-bottomed boat."

"No big lake and no fishing!" Carter repeated in amazement. "Well, I like that!" But his tone did not indicate any great degree of liking: it was plainly sulky. "You forget that I can row well and swim well. Anybody 'd think I was a baby."

"Not any one who knows how treacherous Big Twin is," his mother answered decisively. "You know how careful the men are, and how often they come in, on account of the high wind, even when the fish are biting. It is bad enough to sit quietly in a boat that is easily tipped without having two boys stand up and move about as you must do in fishing, and on a lake that gets excited without warning as Big Twin does. You may make your own choice. I want you to be suited because I want you both to enjoy your vacation. I'm going up

to the office now, and I'll arrange the exchange if you say so."

"But — but — " Carter hesitated. He hated to "craw-fish," but the proposed arrangement with its restrictions certainly did not appeal to him. It was too dear a price to pay for the sake of any round-bottomed boat, no matter how speedy and graceful. While he hesitated, irresolute, Sid came to his rescue.

"This is a dandy, Car!" he called out. He was just sending the boat around the raft with long, even strokes. "It pulls splendidly: you can tell that right away. I like these oars, too: they're spoons. Better try it before you decide."

"All right!" Carter agreed promptly, jumping at the chance. "Please wait, mother. I — I'll decide by and by. Come in for me, Sid."

"Better not take any chances," Sid whispered warningly, as he brought the boat up to the end of the dock. "I want to fish if you don't, and gee whiz! is n't that big lake a peach, though? Go on! tell her!"

"All right, mother," Carter called after Mrs. Carroll's retreating figure; "you need n't make any fuss about it. Sid wants to keep this one."

"So does Carter," Sid shouted as an amendment.

Mrs. Carroll turned and nodded, with difficulty suppressing a smile. Carter was determined, very, but as Mr. Carroll often said, Carter's mother was even more determined; and she used her determination wisely to keep her only son from becoming one of those disagreeable, dictatorial boys that spoil the peace of so many

American families. Carter knew by experience that if his mother said "no fishing" and "no big lake" it meant just that, not for a few days or a week, but for the entire time of their stay.

The house was packed with guests, and even the boat-house on the shore was converted into a lodging place. Carter and Sid soon found that they were the envy of the boys and even of some of the girls, on account of their tent.

"We tried to get it," the two Mason boys informed Sid confidentially; "but we found that Mrs. Carroll had reserved it some time ago. I suppose you could n't put two more cots in it, could you?"

"I'm afraid not," Sid replied, not very regretfully.

"We might divide up," the other boys suggested. "We could use the tent one week and you the next week, you know." But even this ingenious arrangement failed to appeal to the tent's possessors.

When the "I.'s" inspected it, they promptly offered to exchange their room for it, but were as promptly refused. Ida, as usual, was spokesman.

"Sorry, Ida," Carter assured her, smiling broadly as he spoke; "but this is a rattlesnake country, you know, so it would n't be safe to put you two girls out here."

"Rattlesnakes nothing!" Ida's tone showed her disbelief. "That's just an excuse because you don't want to change. I'll wager a box of chocolates we don't see or hear a rattler all the time we are here."

"Done!" Carter promptly took out his note book, wrote out the wager, signed his name, and passed both

book and fountain pen to Ida. "Sign it, 'I.,' then we'll give it to Sid to keep. There are rattlers about here, whether we see one this summer or not."

"Yes, and there are sea serpents, they say," Ida jeered, "but I'd have to see one to believe it."

The annual water sports and land contests took place within a week after the arrival of the Carroll party. Carter and Sid entered for several of the dashes, the obstacle race, and the swimming contest, while every boy in the house took part in the tub race. The audience was composed of all the "Good Times" guests as well as the people from the many camps near by. They were seated in their boats, or on benches on the shore and along the sides of the dock. Even the raft had its burden of spectators, lounging along the edges, or perched up on the high diving ladder. The judges were in a boat close to the end of the long narrow dock, which was the goal, and the announcer, with a huge megaphone, tramped up and down the dock as he shouted out the result of the various contests. Once or twice he barely escaped stepping into the water in his excitement.

After several exciting dashes, a rowing contest for ladies, and a canoe race for the men, the tub race was called. All but one of the tubs got away from the raft in fine style; that one, Albert Mason's, foundered at the start. From the first Sid was in the lead. He had discovered that a steady, even paddling with both hands accomplished more than the frantic efforts some of the others were making. He had a good three-foot lead and was sailing along serenely almost at the dock when he

felt a vicious sidewise push that sent him spinning away at right angles to the goal. Only his good balance kept him from pitching headlong out of his unsteady craft. At the same time the second tub tipped over sending its occupant sprawling into the water while it gyrated gayly out of reach.

Sid paddled away with might and main. He heard the cheering but he was so intent on his efforts to keep his tub from foundering that he did not discover who had come in first until he bumped against the dock directly in front of the judges. By that time he had managed to recover lost ground, or water rather, and found that he was second.

He knew that he had been purposely fouled, and was boiling with wrath over such a dishonorable trick. As he was helped up to the dock he was just beginning an indignant explanation to the bystanders when he suddenly realized that it was Carter himself who had won. Carter! Sid stood staring at him in open-mouthed chagrin, and his proposed explanation ended then and there.

The two boys had been friends for years, with the exception of occasional intermissions of varying length, during which they never intended to speak to each other again. But these unhappy intervals had been few and far between, of late, and of increasingly shorter duration. In all this time Sid had never known his friend to be guilty of a really disloyal action. He was sometimes sulky, sometimes even quarrelsome; and he was often inclined to dictate in their games; but dishonorable —

never! For a few moments Sid hesitated, torn between his sense of justice and his love for his chum. Besides, he owed so much to the Carrolls for making him one of the family, as they had done. But it was n't fair! It was n't fair! He would have won — he could n't have helped it — if things had been straight, but it was n't the victory he cared most for, after all.

When he reached this point in his thoughts, he turned accusingly toward Carter, but the latter was smilingly receiving the congratulations of a group of girls of which the "I.'s" were the center. The big dimples which he despised, because they brought him so much teasing from the rest of the boys, were very much in evidence as he made his laughing explanation.

"I did n't know I stood any show at all," Sid heard him say in gleeful tones. "When I looked up a moment before there were two or three tubs ahead of me. I knew I had n't any time for star-gazing, so I just pitched in and paddled with all my might."

Sid's lip curled scornfully as he listened.

"I wanted to take a prize," Carter went on, "but I had more hope of the swimming contest, unless Iva gets the best of me. I don't see yet how I won this."

"But I do!" Sid muttered through set teeth; "and I hope you'll enjoy your prize." With an effort he kept back the indignant accusation, and busied himself in pulling his sweater over his bathing suit until he had time to regain his self-control.

There were two swimming contests, one for the men alone, the other for the young people. In the latter the

"I.'s" were the only entries among the girls. Ida was a good swimmer and a fine diver, but Iva, who could not dive at all, was an unusually strong, rapid swimmer. She had already demonstrated her skill by swimming across Big Twin, a feat that only one or two of the best swimmers among the men had duplicated. Carter and Sid knew what a strong antagonist she would be, and the rest of the boys had seen enough of her performance in the water to realize that she was a foeman worthy of their steel.

"We'll have to put in some pretty good licks to get ahead of her," Albert Mason remarked, somewhat dolefully. "She's the queerest combination though; says it scares her to dive. Did you ever hear of such silliness when she can swim like a fish? Just like a girl!"

Carter had his heart set on winning the swimming race. He knew that Iva was ahead of him in long distance swims which require easy, strength-saving motions, but he hoped to beat her in the short, speedy trial. He realized, though, that he was not in the best condition for the contest. He had already taken part in several dashes, as well as the obstacle race and the tub race, and was feeling decidedly tired from his exertions; but he made an effort to throw off the feeling of lassitude that oppressed him.

The entries for the race included the "I.'s," the two Masons, Carter and Sid, but when the race was called, the latter had disappeared. The rest, however, were paddled luxuriously to the starting point on the shore near the boat-house, in the canoes. There followed an

anxious moment while they were taking position; then one of the judges raised his pistol; the other counted: "One! Two! Three!" At the report the contestants were off, swimming as rapidly as they could towards the goal at the end of the dock.

At first Carter had all he could do in getting a good start and making sure that he was not wasting precious time by swimming away from the direct line to goal; but at the end of a few moments he ventured to glance about. Only one head bobbed along near him; its bright red cap proclaimed one of the "I.'s." It was Iva. She too had set her heart on winning, even though it meant victory over Carter whom she admired so heartily. She had a lead of almost three feet, and as Carter took his survey she increased the rapidity of her strokes.

"Oho! my lady!" he thought to himself: "so that's your game, is it? Well, other people can sprint, too: you have n't any copyright on it."

At that he redoubled his efforts, forgetting that he was not in good trim for such strenuous exertion. He had not yet reached the age which is gallant enough to relinquish a victory voluntarily in favor of a girl, even as jolly and lovable a lassie as Iva Grant. Her advantage acted upon him as a spur.

The spectators had risen to their feet with excited cries, as they watched the progress of the race.

"Go it, Carter!" "Come on, Iva, come on!" "Don't be discouraged, Mason; swim the other way — it's nearer!" "Neck and neck now! Hurrah for the winner!"

But the swimmers were oblivious to cheers or jeers,

Carter spurted to such good purpose that he touched the dock fully two feet ahead of the little lady. Had any one suggested, before the race, that he would be willing to give up the prize, he would have treated the suggestion with the scorn it deserved; but as he turned with outstretched hand to help Iva up to the dock he was not only willing, but eager, to hand the prize over to her. He had proven his skill against an adversary of Iva's well-known ability: that was all he cared about.

"Was n't it great?" he panted, breathing hard from his recent efforts. "That was close enough to be really exciting, was n't it? Say, Iva, I don't want the prize; you take it!"

Iva shook her head decidedly, and Carter was just about to urge her to accept it, when she seemed to fade away before his eyes in a very strange manner. The dock, too, began to conduct itself in a most unusual fashion: it went up and down like a see-saw, making all the boats and canoes tied along its sides dance the liveliest kind of jigs. Carter laughed aloud at the comical courtesies they were making to each other. The people near by began to bob up and down too; then there came a crash and blackness. . . .

"He'll be all right now, Mrs. Carroll," he heard a voice saying. The owner of the voice seemed to be over on Big Twin, the words sounded so far away. He wondered who would be all right, and why his mother should worry about the matter anyway. A confused murmur followed, silenced finally by the same commanding voice, this time near at hand.

"Just a little over-exertion," the voice said. "That's why I object to these contests: they are harder, in reality, than the longer swims. Here's this lad, for instance — in two or three running races, then the tub race, each calling for violent exertion — and capping them all by this swimming contest."

"But he swam across the lake yesterday," Mrs. Carroll interrupted, her voice a mingling of motherly anxiety and pride.

"Not half as harmful as this sprinting business, not half!" came the decisive response. "Here, my boy, take another sip of this."

Carter swallowed the warm drink gratefully, and as the owner of the voice renewed his gentle manipulations of his legs and arms, he realized that he must have fainted. Deeply mortified at what he considered a display of weakness, he struggled to his feet and tried to march up the dock, but would have fallen had it not been for a supporting arm.

"Not so fast, my son! You've got a long good life ahead of you to get off this dock."

Carter recognized the voice now; it was the fat, jolly doctor who was staying at one of the camps near by. He was a general favorite in spite of the fact that he was made the target for much good-natured raillery. He grumbled constantly because people did not rest enough during their vacations, but it was evidently a case of "Do as I say and not as I do!" because he himself was always ready for any jollification, from straw rides to masquerades, picnics, or country-dances.

"What's the matter with me?" Carter whispered anxiously, as his mother threw his sweater over his shoulders.

"Nothing much, my boy," the doctor reassured him, adding jovially: "you're simply trying to scare your poor mother to death, that's all. But you're all right now, and so is she; only take my advice, son, and don't overwork that good engine of yours in this way again."

Carter looked at him inquiringly.

"Your body, I mean, boy. You've got a remarkably sound proposition there," touching Carter's chest which was well developed in spite of his slenderness; "I saw that when I examined you after you keeled over: but it needs care the same as any other engine. Keep it in good trim, my boy. Good health makes life worth living. If people would only use their vacations for rest, instead of — "

A chorus of "Whoa! Whoa!" from the beach, interrupted him. The doctor looked up, flushed but laughing, and shook his fist at them.

"I know I'm off on my hobby," he acknowledged grimly; "but it's a pretty sensible hobby after all, my fine scoffers."

"Indeed it is," Mrs. Carroll defended him stoutly, while Carter held out his hand in embarrassment.

"Thank you for helping me, sir," he said earnestly. "I'll remember what you said about the engine, and try to be careful of mine."

"In any more contests to-day?" the doctor demanded crossly.

"No, sir!"

"That's good! Now look here, if you expect to come down to that confounded masquerade to-night — do you? Ah! I thought so! In my young days kids of fourteen or fifteen went to bed at reasonable hours. But if you insist on coming down, be sure you stretch out for an hour or two first, understand?"

"I'll see to it, doctor," Mrs. Carroll interposed before Carter could answer. The vision of her boy lying white and still was before her eyes, giving a ring of sharp decision to her voice. "I don't think I shall permit him — ".

"Oh, please, mother," he pleaded. "My suit's all ready. I'll go lie down now."

They went up to Mrs. Carroll's room because it was more quiet. Mother-like she cheerfully missed the gay little tea which followed the sports, while she made her boy comfortable upon the bed, then sat down beside him and spent the rest of the afternoon reading the latest instalment of a serial in which they were both interested.

"Where's Sid?" he asked after the story was finished. "I have n't seen him since the tub race. He did n't go in for the swim, after all."

"I have n't seen him, either," Mrs. Carroll exclaimed in surprise. "I wonder where he is. He could n't have been around when you — "

"Oh, cut it out, mother!" Carter begged in slangy earnestness. "Just because I was hot and tired, and happened to feel a little faint, there's no use rubbing it in."

His mother smiled at his words, and went on with what she was saying.

"He could not have been around at the time of the swimming race or he would have come up to find out what was the matter. I must go down and look him up, dear. He's my boy, too, remember. Keep quiet until the supper-bell rings, or — " and without stipulating what dire consequences would follow the "or" in case of undue activity, she hurried downstairs.

CHAPTER XV

The Awarding of the Prizes

Sid, meanwhile, had been fighting hard against the bitterness that had taken possession of him. He curtly refused to take part in the swimming race although his name had been posted among the entries. At its close, when Carter collapsed, he started towards him instinctively, but the memory of his friend's treachery came over him and held him back. He hung about on the outskirts of the crowd in keenest anxiety until he heard the doctor's reassuring words to Mrs. Carroll. When Carter started to his feet a few moments later, he walked away hurriedly, and spent the rest of the afternoon in the woods.

It was a miserable time for the poor boy. The thought that his chum could go back on him in such a way, after their years of friendship, hurt him like a knife-thrust. His fists clenched until his knuckles showed white.

"I despise him! I despise him! I despise him!" he muttered through his clenched teeth; but as he said it, he knew that he still cared for him, even though he had done what he did. He ended his outburst of passion by putting his head down against one of the great trees and sobbing hard. The storm washed away his ugly mood, but the hurt remained.

Later, when Mrs. Carroll looked in at the flap of the tent, he was lying on his cot, his face propped up on his hands, reading. He greeted her with a smile and listened, without comment to her account of the afternoon's mishap.

"Carter will dress in my room," she ended. "That will leave the tent for you; or do you know each other's costumes?"

"No, ma'am," Sid answered. "I — I don't think I'll go in for the masquerade. I — "

"Of course you will," she interrupted brightly, laying her hand with caressing touch upon his head. "I'll help arrange a disguise for you, if you have n't already planned one. Why, everybody will be there: it's to be the biggest frolic of the season. Some of the campers will have outlandish costumes, I know. I overheard them talking about it, early this afternoon. Of course you'll come."

"All right!" Sid responded more heartily.

Supper was a hurried affair that night, and the guests vanished immediately afterwards to dress for the masquerade. Promptly at eight-fifteen the big dinner bell sounded; lights were put out in the halls; and a procession of grotesque figures flitted silently down to the dancing hall to join in the opening parade. A motley collection it was, clowns and nobles, fairies and gnomes, overgrown babies and undersized adults; peanut venders, Mother Goose characters, and foreigners of every description.

One old organ grinder with long beard and stooping figure, who sent forth doleful melodies on his ancient

"When the time for unmasking arrived there were some genuine surprises." *Page* 214.

instrument, nearly put a disastrous finish to the frolic at its very beginning. Scrap, the doctor's bulldog, usually the gentlest creature in the world, seemed to resent the music as a personal insult. After a series of long-drawn wails of disapproval, he growled threateningly once or twice. The old man made some teasing motion towards him when, without warning, he sprang straight at his throat. A murmur of horror ran through the crowd, for Scrap was a full blooded bull-dog, with all his breed's ferocity, if aroused. But a low-toned "Scrap! down, sir!" changed tragedy to comedy, and the dog's charge became a joyful scuffle. The secret was out, however, as far as the identity of the organ grinder was concerned. Wherever he went, after that, he was greeted with laughing exclamations: "Whoa!" "Down, Scrap, down!" "People ought to rest during summer: that's what vacation is for!"

It was some time before Mrs. Carroll discovered Sid. He made a really presentable girl dressed in Ida's bathing-suit which had been hurriedly dried by the kitchen fire, for the occasion. As for Carter, she had thought it would be impossible for him to deceive her, even for a few moments, but she found that there were several people about his height, any one of whom might be he. She finally decided that a bent old man dressed as a farmer, accompanied by an equally bent old woman, in sunbonnet and apron, were Carter and Ida, when a familiar voice beside her made her start.

"Shall we dance this two-step?"

With a pleased laugh she seized the Chinaman by his

dangling pigtail, and whispered: "Pretty good, Car! You deceived even me!"

When the time for unmasking arrived there were some genuine surprises. The bent old lady proved to be one of the boys from the camp near by, while Iva appeared as a rough rider, jaunty enough to make even an ex-president long to return to his company. Ida was dressed as an Indian maiden, her long black hair floating far below her waist. There were many clever disguises, but the doctor's was considered the best of all.

"If you can fool your own dog," one of the camp boys exclaimed, "you deserve a medal."

After several dances, the awards for the day's sports were made amid cheers or groans.

The prizes, wrapped in white tissue paper and tied with ribbons, were placed upon a table in the middle of the office and the doctor was unanimously chosen to present them. He accepted only after the grave assurance that it was a very restful task.

Sid stepped forward to receive his prize for the sixty-yard dash, looking as grave and unsmiling as though it were a sentence of exile. When the swimming race was called Carter again urged Iva to accept the prize, and when she refused he insisted on sharing it with her. There was a shout of merriment when it proved to be a set of collar buttons, but Carter was equal to the occasion. He stepped over to the desk, purchased a box of chocolates, and gallantly presented it to the "near-winner," as he called her.

Just before the doctor reached the tub race, Howard

Mason rushed up to Carter, and pulling him into the hall began talking to him in an earnest undertone. The boy's face was flushed and downcast, and he spoke with evident effort, but he kept on bravely until he had told his sorry tale. Carter knew how hard it must be for him, and as soon as he finished, he held out his hand.

"I understand, Howard. It was a pretty mean trick," he added, frankly, "but as you say, you did it without thinking. I 'm glad you 've told me. I 'll fix it all right."

"You don't mind giving it up, do you?" Howard asked anxiously.

"Not a bit!" came the hearty response. "I wanted to win the swimming race and I did. These collar buttons are the prize: are n't they beauties? I don't care a snap about the other; but say, by jingo! that 's it!"

"What 's it?"

"Why, that 's what 's the matter with Sid. He 's been different some way or other, but I could n't make out what was wrong. He scowled and scarcely answered when I spoke to him, and he 's kept out of my way all he could. Surely he does n't think — Look here, Howard did he see you do it?"

"Nope! I don't think so."

"Then that 's what 's the matter! No wonder he 's grumpy. Come on! the doctor 's calling for the tub race now."

He hurried into the office again, and in a few whispered words made the doctor understand what had happened,

and what he wanted done about it. The doctor nodded in pleased satisfaction. He had caught a glimpse of Sid's sudden sidewise sprint, followed by Howard's upset, and had jumped to a pretty fair conclusion; but he was not sure, and no one else referred to the matter, so he was forced to hold his peace. His task, after Carter's information, was a pleasant one.

"Ladies and gentlemen, including the children," he began, bowing in the direction of a group from the young men's camp, many of whom were the possessors of real razors, and one or two of them voters. This opening raised a laugh at their expense, but they took their medicine with cheerful, if somewhat embarrassed, grins. "It has become my painful duty to refuse to bestow the next prize, which is for the tub race, upon Master Carter Carroll because —" he paused tantalizingly, while a murmur of surprise ran around the room — "because he did not win it!"

"But he did!" "Sure, he did!" "He won, all right!" "I saw him!" sounded all about. The campers were aggressively positive in their assertions.

"Excuse me, little ones," the doctor addressed them especially, again raising a laugh from the rest of the company, "but I have his own word for it. By a strange concatenation of circumstances —"

A prolonged "Whew!" interrupted the speaker.

"As I was saying," he went on calmly ignoring the interruption, "by a strange concatenation of circumstances — do you get it, little ones? — the winner was fouled when he was almost within reach of the dock.

Both he and the —" he paused to choose as mild a word as possible, "well, the one who fouled him, were knocked out, while Master Carroll paddled up to the home-plate — I mean the dock — in ignorance of what had happened. But the secret, like the Spartan boy's wolf — or was it a fox, by the way? — gnawed at the guilty one's vitals until he made public the true state of the case. When the — ah! — apparent winner learned the true inwardness of his outward victory he insisted that the real victor should receive recognition. I should like to express my next words in Latin, ladies and gentlemen, but I fear these critical youngsters on my left, who, I understand, carry on most of their camp conversation in that tongue: so I will say, in good plain English: 'To the victor belong the spoils!' Will Master Sidney Armstrong kindly step forward and receive his — ah! — spoils?"

It was not a case of willingness to step forward! Amid a perfect storm of applause Sid was promptly pushed up to the doctor, and to his mingled dismay and delight, was flourishingly presented with a gold scarf-pin in the shape of a tiny tub.

It was really one of the handsomest of the prizes, and the boy was delighted with it; but the doctor's low-toned words, as he fastened it into the tie of the bathing-suit, meant even more to him.

"You knew all the time, did n't you?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, sir, but I — I thought —"

"I understand. I 'm proud of you, my boy. Carroll has a friend worth having."

Sid hurried in search of Carter and found him just leaving the desk with two bottles of sarsaparilla and a box of cheese-wafers tucked under his arm.

"I 'm sorry, Car," he said without explanation of any kind.

"Don't mention it!" was the brief reply.

"But I don't see how I could have believed you 'd do such a rotten thing, even for a minute," he persisted remorsefully.

"Neither do I!" Carter agreed cheerfully, at which they both laughed, and the storm was over.

"Come on out to the tent," Carter urged. "I rushed my supper to get into this Chinaman's rig before mother came to the room to dress, so I 'm almost starved now. Hurry, or we 'll be mobbed."

"Wait just a minute," Sid called back as he ran in to the desk. He returned in a short time with a bottle of olives, a box of fruit crackers, and two glasses.

"This is the last eatable in the house," he said, chuckling over his luck. "Office is completely sold out. If we don't get away double-quick we 'll be held up. I 'm a candidate for the bread line myself; I did n't eat any supper at all."

They waited in the shadow a moment until the coast seemed clear, but just as they were about to leave the piazza, the "I.'s" who were seated on the top step intercepted them, and began talking over the evening's fun. In the darkness they did not see the boys' burdens or they would not have spoken as freely as they did.

"I 'm so hungry!" Iva exclaimed with a sigh, "and

the office is as barren as the Desert of Sahara: not even a Uneeda biscuit left! It seems as though supper was ancient history."

"Ancient history!" Ida echoed in her forceful way. "You mean legend, or folk-lore, don't you? Because history actually took place, and judging from my feelings right this minute, I don't think supper ever did! I understand perfectly, now, what Johnny Porter means when he talks about 'all-gone-ness'!"

Carter nudged Sid, and as Ida finished speaking they laid their offerings in the girls' laps.

"Oh, jolly!" they exclaimed in chorus.

"Were n't you lucky to get these, though!" Ida added: "and are n't we lucky to be included in the treat! How did you happen to get them? Did you think of it beforehand?"

"No," was Carter's reply, "but I made a rush the instant the prizes were awarded, and Sid followed suit. We felt pretty sure there would be a run on the bank. Come on, let 's start in."

"Oh, no! not here!" Ida objected. "If you could even dimly realize how hungry we are, you would n't suggest exposing such priceless treasures here! It 's too public!" She patted the cheese-wafers lovingly as she spoke.

"Sh!" Sid warned as a group of young people approached. "Lie low!"

They too seemed on the point of starvation, judging from their conversation as they paused near the steps to discuss plans for the next day. They showed no

signs of moving on, so the quartette, with their treasures carefully concealed, disappeared in silence. They paused at the farthest end of the piazza and discussed the advisability of holding the impromptu feast in the tent, which Carter thought was the safest place. But Sid remembered that its interior had not presented a company appearance when he finished dressing for the masquerade, and vetoed the plan.

"The tent 's a regular old shadow-graph when the lamp 's lighted," he objected, giving his friend a warning nudge as he spoke. "Let 's stay here. We can barricade this part beyond the steps with piazza rockers."

They immediately acted upon this suggestion, and soon a row of high-backed chairs draped with various shawls and wraps that were lying about completely fenced off about ten feet of piazza, forming a secluded little picnic retreat. Then they sat down on the floor in a circle and attacked the supplies with hungry vigor.

"The menu consists of the following, ladies and gentleman," Carter began, when Iva interrupted with a soft peal of laughter that was irresistible.

"We don't want to be on the menu," she objected in a laughing whisper. "We might not be tender. If it's a choice of eating or being eaten I prefer to be the 'bo'sun tight and a midshipmite, and the crew of the captain's gig!' That is," she added, with polite afterthought, "if it's all the same to the rest of you."

Carter saw the point of the joke and changed his address.

"Ladies and gentleman, the menu consists of cheese-wafers and olives, fruit crackers and sarsaparilla —"

"With a chocolate or two for dessert," Iva interpolated.

"Fall to, everybody!" he went on; "but don't make a racket or we'll be overhauled and forced to give up our booty. Let me have your knife, Sid. The cork in this olive bottle is put in for keeps. I'm afraid to break the neck of the bottle; it might attract attention."

Instinctively Sid's hand flew to where his pockets ought to be, much to the amusement of the girls. Carter's Chinaman outfit was largely pajamas with one empty pocket; Ida's Indian costume included a beaded bag, also empty.

"It's up to the rough rider," Carter remarked. "Knife please, T. R. Jr.!"

Much to their surprise Iva, usually so gentle and retiring, calmly produced a large three-bladed knife, and presented it.

"I've always thought boys had the best of it in the matter of clothes," she explained seriously, "and now I'm sure of it. These pockets are solid comfort."

Just as they were settled comfortably to the feast, they heard footsteps coming down the piazza.

"Who on earth put these chairs across here in this silly way?" an impatient girlish voice exclaimed. The words were accompanied by an angry shove against the barrier. "There are too many boys and girls in this place to suit me."

"But you were a girl yourself not so very long ago," a manly voice protested mildly. "Come on, dear! don't

be cross any more. I promise not to dance with her again. I only asked her because I thought — "

"Then don't think!" his companion snapped in reply.

"The 'Scrappy Dans'!" Ida whispered softly.

This was the nickname given to one of the engaged couples who seemed to be really happy only when they were in the midst of a squabble. It had been used by some one in a joke, and the rest of the guests had taken it up.

Meanwhile the quartette crouched as close to the house as they could, scarcely daring to breathe except for an involuntary "Oh!" from Ida as the chair was shoved back and one of its rockers hit her elbow. But the exclamation passed unnoticed by the "Scrappy Dans": they were too deeply engaged in their wrangle. They kept up a heated argument for several minutes, much to the chagrin of the unwilling eavesdroppers, then the tone of their conversation changed and "sweetheart" finally allowed "dearest" to lead her away.

"Whew!" Carter whistled in relief, as they stretched themselves after their cramped positions. "Is n't she a cross-patch, though!"

"Too many engaged people in this place to suit me," Ida mimicked the lady to perfection.

"But I'd object, too," Iva confessed frankly, "if the man I was engaged to danced as often with another girl as he did to-night!"

"Hear! hear!" Sid jeered teasingly. "I never thought you were so spunky, 'I.' !"

Much subdued giggling followed this sally, interrupted finally by a decisive voice.

"Ida! Iva! I wonder where they are."

"I think they went upstairs some time ago," Mrs. Carroll's voice responded. "I see the tent is dark, so the boys must be in bed. I'm going, too, after I fill my water pitcher."

It was one of the free and easy customs at the "Good Times" for the guests to fill their own pitchers with the clear, cold water from the pump at the end of the piazza. The "Growlers' Parade" started about ten each night.

"But I thought the boys always did that for you," Mrs. Grant remarked in surprise. "I suppose they forgot it, to-night."

"No, they did n't forget." Mrs. Carroll laughed heartily as she spoke. "They filled it as soon as the prizes were awarded, and left it on one of the tables in the hall. Evidently the card players wanted to use the table, because they placed the pitcher in the corner of the steps, and when I came up to get it I found old Scrap drinking away as though he enjoyed — what was that?"

The story of the bulldog was too much for the listeners. They burst into peals of laughter as they crept forth from their retreat, and after merry good-nights hurried off to bed.

CHAPTER XVI

The Water Carnival

THE Water Carnival, also an annual event at the lakes, took place early the following week. All the guests entered into the contest — it would not have been the "Good Times" had they done otherwise — and every one spent a busy day decorating the boats for the evening's parade.

The younger children reaped a harvest selling ropes of ground pine to twine about the sticks and strings used in the decorations. They did not care to pull up the plant too far in advance, for fear it would turn yellow, but they scoured the woods for days beforehand, locating it and fixing their claims by putting sticks into the ground near by to which were fastened papers with the finder's name upon them. Young as they were, they were scrupulously careful in respecting each other's property: the older boys and girls commented upon it.

Carter and Sid held a protracted pow-pow in their tent in regard to the scheme of decoration for their boat. They meant to have it different from the other boats if they could possibly manage it.

"Why not trim it up like a sail-boat?" Sid asked, after several suggestions had been made and negatived for one reason or another. "If the shape of the sail

is outlined with lanterns it would show up well at night."

"Yep, I know it would," Carter answered. "I thought of that, but we can't do it: the 'Scrappy Dans' are already using it, and we don't want to be copy-cats."

"Oh, well, it does n't matter." Sid took his disappointment easily. "We can think up something else. Anyhow, it would take too many lanterns, because each rope would have to be outlined."

"That's so! And say, we'd better get our lanterns before they're sold out."

"When did they come?"

"About an hour ago. The clerk says he'll open the boxes just as soon as he gets the mail bag off. Come on! It'll pay to pick them out ourselves. Last year some of them were much larger and handsomer than others. We want the odd shapes if we can find them."

When they reached the office they found that the lantern boxes had just been opened. The "I.'s" were already choosing their supply.

"Here's a box of dandies!" Carter whispered to Sid as he pulled an extra long lantern to its full length; The clerk overheard the whisper.

"Hands off that box, please," he warned. "Those big ones are for the office."

"Why?" Carter asked in disappointed tones. "The office is n't going in the lake parade, is it?"

"No, it is n't," was the good-natured reply, "but we have arranged to have a country-dance here afterwards. People from the farmhouses for miles around will be

over to see the carnival, so it's a good time to have it. These are almost as large," indicating a box at the other end of the counter. "You can have first pick, too."

The boys spent the next two hours at the dock helping the "I.'s" trim their boat. The girls had decided upon a canopy effect. A large white parasol swayed gracefully in the center, each of its points decorated with a lantern. From the high supports nailed to the ends of the boat, and at each side of the middle seat, cords, twined about with ground pine, were strung; at each end hung a barrel hoop — both cords and hoops outlined with lanterns. Before the quartette's work was finished the boat was converted into a dainty bower which would be especially effective after dark when the lanterns were lighted.

The "Scrappy Dans" were at work on their boat just across the narrow dock, and the quartette was treated to a serial in the way of wrangling. The two had grown so in the habit of arguing over trifles that it had become second nature to them. They completely ignored any bystanders.

"It's as good as a show," Sid muttered softly, winking at the girls as he spoke.

"'Blow hot, blow cold!'" Carter quoted. "It's always blow, though!"

"Regular lightning change artists, are n't they?" Iva whispered. "Just listen to that!"

It was not strange that they all laughed, because as Sid spoke the young man had been saying: "Look, dear! don't you think this one ought to be hung here?" To which the young lady responded sweetly: "Put it

where you think best, Jackie." But when Iva spoke, a moment later, the wind had veered to another quarter, and the lady was declaring, with an angry stamp of her foot: "Don't do it that way: it looks perfectly silly!"

"Perhaps it would be best to give up the decoration altogether," the young man remarked in dignified haughtiness.

"I quite agree with you!" came the biting retort. And without another word she started up the dock.

"She's forgotten to give him back his ring," Ida whispered. "She's returned it twice since we've been here! No! there she comes now."

"I beg your pardon!" they heard in icy tones from the returning lady. "Your property, I believe?" As she spoke she removed the handsome solitaire from her finger and held it towards him. Without a word he stepped forward to take it from her, but it slipped through her fingers, sparkling brightly as it rolled merrily along one of the planks of the dock, and dropped into the water with a little splash.

"Oh! my ring! my ring! my own beautiful ring!" she sobbed, springing frantically after it. "It serves me right for being so wicked!"

In her excitement she was on the point of jumping into the water, dainty white morning gown and all, when the young man interfered.

"Wait! I'll get it! It's shallow all around the dock. Here it is!"

He dried it with great care, then calmly dropped it into his pocket, and after a formal "Good-morning!"

set to work once more upon the boat, whistling tunefully.

The quartette had obligingly turned their backs, not wishing to intrude upon the reconciliation they expected to follow the restoration of the ring, but the young man's cavalier course made their precaution unnecessary.

"That's my ring!" she flashed angrily.

"It was your ring," was the quiet correction.

"It's mine now," she persisted, "and I — I want it! I'm sorry!"

"Do you mean that?" he demanded shortly.

"Oh, Jack, of course I do. I — "

Just at this point Ida indulged in an alarming spasm of coughing. The interruption had the desired effect: the two weather-cocks strolled over to the woods to finish the peace pact in the proper manner, leaving their boat half trimmed.

"Silly things!" Ida apostrophized them disdainfully; then the four set to work and soon finished their task to the great satisfaction of the girls.

"When are you going to trim your own boat?" Iva inquired after they had thanked the boys for their help.

"Don't know," Carter replied with an indifferent shrug. "We have n't decided on a plan yet."

"Can't you think up something different?" Ida asked.

"What?" both boys demanded at once.

"Why, a — a gondola, or a steamboat, or — "

"By jingo!" Carter exclaimed; "if we only could! You know — the 'Clermont.'"

The boys raced up to the barn discussing the plan as

they ran. After much ransacking they succeeded in finding some old boxes, a stove-pipe, and the necessary tools. At the office they purchased a ball of stout twine and some nails, then they hurried down to the dock again.

"Don't tell people what it's to be," Ida urged. "It won't be any fun unless it's a surprise."

"But they'll all be crowding down here after dinner," Carter replied. "They'll be sure to ask questions, or watch us and find out for themselves."

"I tell you what we might do," Sid suggested. "Put all the stuff into the boat, and right after dinner we'll row over to the neck. We can do the work in that little cove and no one will see it until it's finished!"

"But how will we get back for supper?" Carter asked anxiously. "It's too far to walk around."

"Let's take something with us and eat over there, then we need n't show up until we fall into the parade. Wish you girls could come, too," he added. "Is your mother going in the boat with you, to-night?"

"No! she's decided to stay on the beach with Mrs. Carroll. They think they will enjoy the parade more than if they were in the boats."

"Then why not row your boat over with us," Carter urged, "and have a regular picnic?"

After many explanations and some coaxing Mrs. Grant agreed to the plan. She disliked having the girls miss their regular meals.

"We intend to surprise everybody," Carter assured her. "We'll be right over on the neck, you know. If you should want us we can easily hear the megaphone.

It is n't like going through into Big Twin. And we'll take a good supper with us."

But their confident request for lunch boxes — a request that was quite common at the "Good Times," where fishing appealed more strongly than meal hours, — met with a most unusual reception.

"Sorry, boys," the clerk replied, "but it's impossible. Cook 's away for several days, and we're expecting a big crowd of extras for supper to-night. Short of waitresses, too! It would be as much as my life is worth to ask them to put up boxes now!"

"Then we'll take some stuff from the office," Sid compromised. But here, too, there were difficulties, as the fresh supply of "stuff" had not yet come up from the station. Rather than give up their plan they gathered together whatever they could find in the way of crackers and fruit, and decided to make their supper off of fish.

"We'll catch a few perch after we finish the boat," Sid promised the "I.'s" confidently. "That'll settle the 'eats' all right!"

"Of course it will," Ida replied with equal confidence. "And it's lots of fun to make a fire on the rocks and cook them. I'll borrow a broiler or a pan, and Iva can get two or three knives and forks. You boys be sure to take pepper and salt and matches, then we'll be all fixed."

The two boats got away as soon as they could collect the things. The girls carried the fishing poles and cooking supplies in their boat, while the boys' boat was loaded with boxes, pipe, hammers and nails, a saw,

lanterns and cord. It was only a short pull to the neck, and they set to work in such earnest that it was not long before their boat began to assume the appearance of a miniature steamboat. But the finishing touches, — the cabin windows through which the light must show, and the proper arrangement of the strings to work the side wheels — took longer than they counted on. The big dinner bell sounding from across the lake took them by surprise. It also made them realize that they were hungry.

The boys baited their hooks hurriedly, and each taking a boat pulled out a bit and cast for the expected bites. Patiently they waited, changing their rods from one side to the other, and pulling here or there in an effort to catch their supper. But either the fish were not hungry or else they were "plain ugly," as Carter expressed it; not even a nibble rewarded their coaxing casts. They pulled in at last, sadder and wiser, also hungrier, feeling that uncaught fish are a very uncertain quantity.

The girls meanwhile had kindled a bright fire from bits of driftwood which they gathered on the shore. The frying pan was in readiness, and the contents of the provision box had been spread out to the best of their ability, but it made a pretty meagre showing. As they gathered about the un-festive board, a vision of crisp, brown perch arose before them so plainly that they could almost smell the appetizing odor. Ida forgot and smacked her lips, but she soon found that the reality, crackers and apples, was a poor substitute.

"This makes me think of the old receipt for rabbit

pie," Iva remarked mischievously. "It began: 'First catch your rabbit!'"

"Guess that applies to fish suppers, too," was Carter's gloomy answer.

"Never mind!" Sid spoke teasingly, trying to pat him on the back but Carter jerked away. "We'll surprise them when we join the parade even if we are hungry, and we could n't have done it if we had finished the 'Clermont' at the dock. Our hunger 's in a good cause. Too bad about you girls, though!"

But the "I.'s" promptly reassured him on that point.

As dusk deepened into darkness they sat in their boats, rocking gently, and gazed in silence at the beautiful picture. The procession was forming on the other side of the lake, and one boat after another was transformed into a fairy-like craft, beautiful or fantastic. Beacon fires flared up at several points around the lake, and the "Shoot the Chutes" of one of the cottages began to glow with a line of red torches up and down its entire length. Suddenly the bugle from the boys' camp sounded the Assembly, its clear notes echoing and re-echoing from the surrounding mountains. It was evidently the signal for the start: the boats at once fell into line, the towering sail-boat in the lead, and commenced a stately progress around the lake.

Not until then did the quartette awake from the dream of beauty before them. Hurriedly lighting their own lanterns they shot their boats out into the lake just as the procession neared the cove. They overheard many exclamations of surprise from the boats floating by, as

they rested on their oars and waited to fall in at the end of the line. A number of people openly admired the girls' dainty canopied bower, while the "Clermont" produced a genuine sensation as she seemed to steam on her way, her paddle wheels churning the water rhythmically. In reality, they were moved by ropes in Sid's hands, while Carter, seated in the stern, paddled as quietly as possible.

The long line of boats, all in festive array and glowing with light, swung slowly around the lake. Gay greetings were exchanged as they floated past the camps on the shore. Once or twice word was passed along the line in regard to the route: "Watch out for the rock on the right!" "Submerged stump near the entrance to the channel!" but no mishaps occurred, which was fortunate as many of the boats were top-heavy with their load of trimmings. It would have been hard to convince a spectator who had not seen the boats by daylight, that they were all row-boats or canoes. The "Scrappy Dans'" decorations towered aloft like a genuine sail-boat whose canvas was outlined with lights.

"Guess they stopped scrapping after we left, and buckled down to business," Carter remarked, gazing at the beautiful craft appreciatively.

Much ingenuity was displayed in all the decorations. One canoe was a floating bower of greenery through which lanterns peeped out like twinkling stars: another bore flaring torches at either end, which made it attractive in the parade but failed to add to its desirability as a near neighbor. One of the boats held a small tree in

whose branches a solitary red lantern was hidden. This was immediately christened: "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine." There were boats with swaying festoons, and boats with arches, one and all adding to the beauty of the scene.

After the procession had wound its way around the lake for the benefit of the audience gathered on shore and beach, the boats began to circle the raft, drawing in closer and closer until all were massed together, the occupants of each boat holding fast to another in order to keep themselves from drifting. Comments, complimentary and otherwise, were exchanged, and a variety of songs from "Come Where the Lanterns Glow," to "Solomon Levi," were sung with enjoyment if not operatic tunefulness, while the judges were making their decision. Once more the doctor officiated as prize-giver — "the price of popularity," he explained it; after which modest statement he made the awards amid much laughter and applause. For a wonder the decisions met with unanimous approval.

"The first prize winner I feel sure needs no announcement: its beauty speaks for itself — the sail-boat! Will the 'Scrappy D' — that is, pardon the mistake! I mean will Mr. Allington and Miss Winters kindly step forward and receive the prize?"

"Can't!" the young man sang out cheerfully, not in the least provoked by the doctor's slip of the tongue. "Boat's so top-heavy we had to part our hair in the middle and hold our tongues straight or we'd have gone over long ago!"

"So that accounts for it!" a voice from the darkness exclaimed involuntarily; but what it accounted for was not stated, although it was pretty generally understood to refer to the calm peace that had prevailed in the sail boat.

"We remembered," the doctor went on, "that each boat would probably contain two occupants, so we have chosen our prizes accordingly; either something that may be divided or that can be used jointly — in this case, spoons!"

Cheer after cheer rang out at the appropriateness of the selection, until a voice started the formula:

"What's the matter with the 'Scrappy Dans'?"

"They're all right!" was the prompt reply.

"Who's all right?"

"The 'Scrappy Dans'!"

"Who says so?"

"Everybody!"

"Who's everybody?"

"The 'Scrappy Dans'!"

After the tumult quieted down the doctor proceeded.

"And now for the second prize! Our first choice seems to have struck the right spot; let us hope the second will be equally popular. But if it is not — as you are strong, be merciful! Remember, I'm marooned on the raft with boats, boats, all about, but not a boat for me! And let me assure you, fellow suf — guests, I mean, that this judging business is no joke. It's almost as grateful a task as umpiring! Among so many beautiful and wonderful efforts," — he bowed right and left amid

cries of "Hear! Hear!" — "it requires good judgment on the part of the committee to make the proper selection. Already I have lost many pounds over my strenuous task."

As the doctor weighed over two hundred, his touching statement produced hard-hearted laughter instead of sympathy.

"In regard to the second prize," he went on, "after much thought and discussion, — I did the former, the other two judges the latter — we decided to award the prize to the really excellent model of the 'Clermont' which our young friends have succeeded in producing. Considering the resources at hand, or rather the lack of them, we think these young people have accomplished wonders. I take great pleasure in presenting the second prize — behold it, good people, a five-dollar gold piece — to Master Sidney Armstrong and Master Lindsay Carteret Carroll."

The applause which followed was hearty and prolonged enough to assure the judges of the popularity of their second award.

"Whew!" Carter ejaculated in astonishment. "I thought it would be a box of candy or something like that, but five dollars!"

"I'll warrant the doctor had a finger in supplying the prize money," Ida remarked sagely, after the two boys had tried to put their thanks into words and failed. "The boys have kept his boat clean ever since they've been here. I heard that the second prize was to be photographs of the lakes."

"We know from the way in which the awards have been received," the doctor went on, "that they meet with the general approbation. It could scarcely be otherwise when we see the beauty of one winner and the originality of the other; but for the third prize — ah! there's the rub! So many beautiful boats, so many clever designs — the task of choosing the most beautiful, the most clever, is indeed a Herculean one. Ladies and gentlemen, also the children, at this very moment I am reading your thoughts."

"Prove it! Prove it!" came in a shout of dissent.

"I'll prove it all right," the doctor declared lightly. "Each one of you, right this minute, is thinking — 'My boat ought to come third!' Am I right?"

He evidently was, judging from the laughter which answered him.

"You've heard the story of the boy who was asked for the core of his apple, have n't you? He answered: 'Sure you can have it, but there ain't goin' to be no core!' Same here: 'There ain't goin' to be no third prize!' Good-night!"

The country-dance which followed was a great success, and the guests enjoyed watching the quaint figures woven by the dancers: "Bird in a Cage," "Chasing the Squirrel," and "Hunting the Fox." But, as Carter expressed it, these could not compare, in the eyes of four hungry young people with "Marie in the pantry chasing bread and cold meat into the dining-room and hunting pieces of pie for a finish!" By the time they had appeased their hunger, the dance

was over, and the Growlers' Parade was in full swing.

They found so much to do each day at the lakes, boating, fishing and swimming, walking, driving, and picnics, that the month seemed to fly away, and before they knew it their very last day at the "Good Times" had come. Carter and Sid had been only moderately successful in their fishing trips. Both boys were disappointed because Mr. Carroll decided, at the last minute, not to join them. In fact he did not take any vacation at all. Business was dull and he felt that he could not afford the added expense, but he did not express it in just that way to Mrs. Carroll. He "could n't spare the time, and he'd try to take his vacation later!" Mr. Grant appeared for the last few days, however, and fished from daylight to dark, making the record catch, both for size and numbers, of the whole season.

On the last morning at the lakes, Ida was swinging idly in one of the hammocks not far from the boys' tent. She looked the picture of vacation ease, as she lay propped up on bright colored pillows, reading one of the new magazines. A large box of chocolates, still unopened, lay beside her. Such inactivity was not usual with Ida, but she had had a long tramp before breakfast that morning, and expected later, to go in for a final swim.

As she reached out lazily for the box of candy, her eyes still bent upon her story, she heard a queer rattling sound. It startled her at first, but she quickly recovered herself and glancing towards the tent saw Carter, Sid

and Iva, apparently busy in sorting and dividing their snap-shots. The "Good Times" very sensibly provided a dark room for its guests so that their pictures could be developed and printed at once.

"You're dreadfully funny, aren't you, Car?" she called out in sarcastic tones.

"Funny? Why? How?" he answered without looking up.

"Mr. Innocent!" she jeered. "If I couldn't imitate a rattler better than that, I'd —" A scream of terror finished her sentence; even while she was speaking, a movement not far from the hammock attracted her attention, and she found herself gazing at the upreared head of a repulsive looking snake. It was about four feet long but it lay among the ferns at the foot of the tree, and to the terrified girl looked at least twice its size, as she stared at the darting fangs with shuddering intensity.

The boys saw it almost as soon as she did, and seizing the first weapons they could lay hands upon, which proved to be stout saplings cut for mountain climbing, they rushed towards the reptile.

"Don't move! Don't get out!" Carter shouted in warning. "It can't rear up as high as you are."

"Don't move!" Ida could not have disobeyed the command to save her life. She lay propped up on her elbow staring at the ugly head with its venomous fangs as though completely fascinated. Only after the boys had despatched it was she once more capable of motion; then she lay back in the hammock shuddering with

horror. Carter adopted the very best course to restore her to her usual assertiveness.

"I'll take my property, please," he remarked, calmly appropriating the box of chocolates. "I hope they are fresh."

"Those are my chocolates!" Ida recovered enough to interfere.

"Sid! Produce the evidence!"

Whereupon Sid ran over to the tent and returned an instant later with a small note-book. Carter flipped its pages over until he found what he sought.

"There, my lady! Do you deny that signature? Are there, or are there not rattlers in this region?"

By this time Ida had recovered from her fright sufficiently to argue the matter.

"One swallow does n't make a summer," she began lightly, "and neither does — "

"But it does, too," Carter retorted, interrupting her. "Or at any rate it wins the wager, because we distinctly said: 'A rattler!' Is n't he a perfect beauty, though? That skin of yours will make handsome belts and pocket-books, old fellow," he apostrophized the snake. "Won't it, Sid? It must be the male, because it's black and so beautifully marked. They always travel in couples, you know," he went on, winking at Sid as he spoke. "Mrs. Rattler will be trailing along pretty soon."

"Here! you may have the candy!" Ida said, with a nervous glance about before she stepped gingerly out of the hammock. "And — please take down our hammock for me, will you, boys? We won't want to use it

again — I mean it has to be packed. I — I have to help mother." She fled into the house as though she were sprinting in a dash.

"Guess Mrs. Grant must have sent her a wireless message," Sid laughed. "Where did Iva go?"

"Iva? She disappeared the instant she caught sight of his majesty. Guess she received an earlier message. Is n't that just like girls, though! Regular scare-cats!"

"Sometimes," Sid amended: "but sometimes they're as brave as can be. Ida's like that, only this did n't happen to be one of her brave times! Come on and get this fellow skinned while we're about it."

"All right! I'll put these chocolates into our grip first. We'll eat them to-morrow on the train."

The next day was the first of September and the party left for Staten Island on the early train, after what the "I.'s" agreed was the jolliest vacation they had ever had: a verdict which the boys endorsed most heartily. Even Mrs. Grant admitted that she had been both comfortable and contented at the "Good Times."

"I don't know what its charm is, though," she acknowledged frankly.

"Oh, it's just free and easy and good-timey," Ida explained. "That's why the same people come back year after year. We're coming again next year," she added as though stating a foregone conclusion.

"Oh! indeed!" her mother ejaculated, as she turned to Mrs. Carroll laughingly. "My girls seem to have become thoroughly Americanized, do you not agree with me? I hope they will take their mother with them,

because — " but two loving arms were about her neck and a contrite girlish voice whispered for her ear alone: "We're coming if the very best mother in the whole world will bring us!"

When they reached the Island, the ladies rode up from the ferry, but there was some delay in securing a carriage so the rest of the party reached home first. As they separated at the corner and the boys neared their own gate, a brown streak shot out and threw itself upon Carter, little red tongue licking his face with frantic joy, little brown tail waving eager welcome. Carter gathered the small dog up in his arms and hugged him frankly.

Minnie, her pretty face wreathed in smiles, waited at the gate looking as though she wanted to follow the dog's welcoming rush.

"My! but I am that thankful to see you," she said, shaking hands with them both. "It's a lonesome house without any boys in it, that it is! Are you glad to get back, Car? I suppose, though, you had fine times."

"Yep, we did, Min, and lots of them! The lakes are all right, but there's no place like h-o-m-e!"

CHAPTER XVII

Latchstrings Out

By the beginning of the second week of September all the "S. I. G.'s" were home, and work and play were resumed as though there had been no break for vacation. School was to open the following Monday, so the club decided to use the last Saturday of the holidays for a trip of some kind.

"The beach is n't much fun now," Johnny said regretfully. "Most of the things are shut up and the water's colder than it usually is this early in the month."

"Let's go fishing, then," Sid suggested. "Wish we could catch some perch or a pickerel, instead of those everlasting sunnies. We ought to get an early start though; they say they bite better before the sun is up."

"Guess they have to bite before the sunny's up," Johnny remarked with a chuckle at his own joke. "If they did n't, the sunny would n't be up."

But the rest ignored the pun if they saw it at all. Before they separated it was agreed that the first one awake should rouse the others.

"Latchstrings out, remember!" Carter warned. "I won't be the first this time because I can't take Min's clock any more. The last time I borrowed it the alarm went off at two o'clock. I tried to smother the noise

under my pillow, but the old thing fell on the floor and hopped about at a great rate. You usually wake early, Sid; be sure to come after me first."

Sid was to spend the night with Arthur, whose mother had made the invitation so urgent the lad could not refuse. The two boys had been better friends since their summer separation, but Arthur was — Arthur, a very trying companion at times, and Sid did not really relish the prospect, even though he was genuinely fond of Mrs. Boynton.

Carter ran up to the third story before going to bed that night to arrange with Minnie for a lunch. At the top of the stairs he stopped and whistled softly. Minnie knew the signal.

"Say, Min," he explained, "I'm going off before sunrise to-morrow — going fishing up at Clove Lake. Put up something for me, won't you?"

"Aw! Wait an' git yer breakfast like a Christian," she coaxed, as she appeared at her door in all the glory of a bright red kimona. She was ready for her beauty sleep, and yawned loudly as she spoke.

"Can't, Min, honestly," Carter informed her, visions of an uncut lawn and unswept paths rising before him. "If I wait I'll — I mean the fish don't bite worth a cent except early in the morning. You'll fix up the lunch, won't you? And don't forget to put some cake in. Put a lot."

"All right," she assented with great good humor, although it meant rising at least a half hour earlier than usual.

Mr. Carroll was wont to declare that Carter could twist Minnie around his little finger, but Mrs. Carroll always insisted that Minnie seemed to enjoy the twisting. At any rate she was very fond of the boy, and he of her.

After Carter was ready for bed he produced from the drawer of his desk, a ball of stout top cord from one end of which dangled a piece of lead. Tied at the other end were two tin shoe-horns, a button hook, and a metal paper cutter. He fastened this contrivance in place by weaving the shoe-horn end in and out of the iron posts of his bed immediately above his pillow. The cord was then carried across the room and the weighted end allowed to dangle outside to within about five feet of the ground. The slightest pull on the weight caused the shoe-horns to jingle loudly against the bed-posts. At first the "S. I. G.'s" had been in the habit of fastening the cords to their wrists, but Mr. Carroll happened to discover the arrangement, and peremptorily forbade it, at least as far as his own boy was concerned.

"You could easily have your wrist dislocated," he explained. "You'll have to use some other method, my son. And while we are on the subject of early rising, it is all right for you to wake each other but you must not stand about afterwards directly under the windows and talk. Your mother and I like to sleep even if you don't. Tell the boys to move on after this, or else keep quiet, do you understand?"

Carter settled down for the night as soon as his "latchstring" was arranged to his satisfaction, but his mind

was so full of the plan for the next day that it was some time before he went to sleep. When he did, finally, he was restless, tossing from one side to the other, and dreaming all sorts of queer dreams. In one of them he thought he saw Dixie Doodle turn into a great black cat that hissed and spit at him when he tried to capture it. Next, it seemed that the "S. I. G.'s" had been disgracefully beaten by the "Stars," and that Mrs. Harper, their own Mrs. Harper, had invited the rival club to a party. Carter was trying to explain to her why the "S. I. G.'s" had not won, and was urging her to invite them instead of the "Stars," when he awakened enough to realize that the good lady was still true to them.

After that he slept more soundly for a short time, but soon began on another dream in which he was pulling in a small-mouthed black bass of tremendous size, while the rest of the "S. I. G.'s" stood about in an admiring semi-circle. Just as he disdainfully refused the net and was preparing to land it with a flourish, the fish gave a big jump which freed it from the hook and sent him sprawling over on his back, at which the onlookers jeered and clapped their hands in derision. With an angry exclamation he awoke with a start and heard the shoehorns jingling merrily over his head. He gazed about him, dazed from sleep for an instant, then scrambled out of bed and hurried to the window.

"All right, fellows!" he called out softly. "Be down in a minute!"

A subdued giggle sounded from below, then a whispered consultation followed by the sound of retreating

footsteps. He hurriedly splashed a little water over his face and hands — time enough to clean up when he returned — and getting into his clothes in short order, started down the stairs his shoes dangling in his hand. Yawning sleepily, he sat down on the lowest piazza step to put them on. It seemed to be earlier than they usually started on their jaunts, but autumn weather had set in, and that meant long nights and short days. Besides, if the rest of the club could stand it, the captain surely could.

He hurried to the nearest corner but the boys were nowhere to be seen, so he retraced his steps along the block, until he came to the Boynton's, where Arthur's cord dangled from his window, in proof that he and Sid were not yet up. Carter opened the gate and had almost reached the cord when a sharp voice arrested him.

"Here! Here! boy! What are you doing?"

It was the private watchman for the block, who had stopped on his round and stood at the gate regarding him suspiciously. For an instant Carter was tempted to retort that he was minding his own business and he wished that other folks would do the same; but he remembered just in time that this was the man's business; that it was this very watchfulness which earned his living.

"I'm waking up two of the fellows," he explained in a whisper. "They're regular old sleepy heads: the rest are up long ago."

"Sleepy-heads? Well, why should n't they be sleepy-heads? What d' you want to wake 'em up for?"

"To go fishing."

"Fishing?" the man repeated. "That is a fish story! Fishing! At this time o' night! Look here, boy — "

"We always go early," Carter whispered.

"But it's only twelve o'clock!"

"I don't believe it!" was the sulky contradiction.

"See for yourself, then." The man held out his watch, and as Carter drew near enough to examine it, he seized him by the shoulder, and peered into his face.

"Well! if it is n't young Carroll! Somebody's been ringing in a joke on you, young man."

"Jerking it in, you mean," was Carter's inward comment. Forgetting even to thank the watchman he hurried along the block and counted the dangling cords: midnight or not, he felt that he must find out who had tricked him. But not one of them was wound in as they always were after the owner was aroused.

"Just wait 'til I find out who did it," he muttered wrathfully, his fists clenching: "I'll settle him all right!"

It had begun to drizzle while he was talking to the watchman, and now it set to work in earnest. He had forgotten his key in his haste, and rather than ring up his father he would have stayed on the side piazza for the rest of the night, but as he crouched back in the corner shivering and uncomfortable, he heard a window raised above him. It was Minnie who had been forced to close her front window on account of the rain, and was raising the dormer window at the side to take its place.

"Hey, Min! Oh, Min!" he whispered after the

softly whistled signal which she recognized at once. "Come down and let me in. Hurry! Don't make a racket!" Minnie obeyed promptly and silently, and in a few minutes he again snuggled into bed, his wrath still at boiling point.

"Anyhow I'm glad it was n't one of the 'S. I. G.'s,'" he thought with relief: a traitor in camp is so much harder to deal with than one on the outside.

At first he felt deeply mortified over the affair and determined to keep it to himself; but after all, nine detectives are better than one, no matter how earnest that one may be; so it ended by his telling the whole story when the boys assembled at the Carrolls' later, as they always did on stormy days. They discussed the false alarm in all its bearings, but were unable to arrive at any solution of the mystery. They felt pretty sure that some of the "Stars" were at the bottom of it; but which ones?

It was Carter alone who had been tricked, but to judge from the boys' talk, one would have thought that nine boys had been rudely aroused and sent on a wild-goose chase along the block. This was the "S. I. G." idea of brotherhood. Good-luck to one meant good-luck to all, and ill-luck, ditto. All unknown to the boys themselves this was a good experience for them, making them ready to help and sympathize with others.

"Everything comes to him who — watches," Sid changed the quotation to suit the case in hand.

"And if it don't come we'll go after it," Johnny supplemented determinedly.

But they did not have to go after it: it came. The last mail that afternoon brought Carter a sheaf of cards which made his fists double up wrathfully at first. Later he saw the joke in a better light and laughed heartily over them. Two were pen and ink sketches, and very clever ones they were. The first was a picture of an open window, a dangling cord, and several shadowy forms beneath. It was labeled "Touching Confidence!" The other was also a picture of an open window framing a figure in pajamas. This was marked: "We touch the button: you do the rest!"

One of the cards said: "Don't get grumpy. We're just stringing you!" Another read: "Latchstrings on the outside, friends!" A third bore a revised version of a well-known nursery rhyme:

"Early to bed and early to rise
Will make a boy healthy and wealthy and wise!
Also wrathy!"

The Carrolls had a hearty laugh over the cards. Carter had begun to see that the temptation to do just what the "Stars" had done would be almost irresistible to the average boy, and his resentment melted away. His good-natured view of the case infected the rest of the club, and when they met the "Stars" at drill the following Thursday, they greeted them with cheerful grins instead of the scowls originally down on the card as their portion.

"Don't rub it in, Cooper," Carter urged laughingly, as he marched up to the captain of the rival team.

"Not much!" Cooper replied admiringly. "You 're all right, Carroll!"

This little episode cleared away the last touch of ill-feeling between the two teams. On the diamond they were still rivals, and pretty evenly matched at that, but they gradually became better acquainted and even enjoyed several outings together.

"The 'S. I. G.'s' are a pretty good set," Cooper informed his team, "and that captain of theirs is a dandy!" Which shows that it is a good thing after all to know how to take a joke.

Poor Mr. Carroll was not finding life much of a joke just at this time, however. Business was dull: several contracts which he counted upon as secure, slipped through his fingers. Strange to say each of these landed in the office of his neighbor, Mr. Walton, who was also a contractor. Mr. Carroll could not understand it, but he redoubled his efforts at the office. At home, where he was usually full of jokes and ready to enter into everything with hearty, almost boyish interest, he became taciturn and abstracted, and often gave short replies or failed to answer at all.

Mrs. Carroll seemed to have her share of trouble also. She appeared at dinner, the night that Carter received the cards, with reddened eyelids and subdued manner, but she refused any explanation when he asked what was the trouble.

"Strange I did n't get my letter," Sid said anxiously. "The English mail is in to-day, is n't it?"

"Yes," Mrs. Carroll answered softly. "Your mother

is — is probably busy — unable to write, you know," she added hurriedly. "Mr. Carroll had a letter from your father, Sid. He says business is very good, indeed, very good!"

"I wish she would write, though," Sid said with a sigh. "It's pretty long between letters even when they're regular, but it's longer still if they don't come."

Mrs. Carroll spoke very gently whenever she answered the boy. She seemed anxious to make up to him for that other love that he was missing so sorely. He and his mother were closer companions than growing sons and their mothers usually are, possibly because of her frail health.

"Poor boy!" Mrs. Carroll exclaimed, with tears in her eyes, as soon as the boys had left the table. "It's hard to deceive him, but his father thinks he will worry unnecessarily. If his mother gets — gets worse — we'll have to tell him."

"Wait until the next mail," Mr. Carroll advised. "He can't go to her, and it will drive him wild to be left in uncertainty. Under the circumstances I think his father is right, but it's hard for the little woman who has to keep the lad from suspecting the truth, is n't it? I'm afraid you were not entirely successful: Sid did not seem to find your explanation very satisfactory. It did n't ring true, you know."

That night Mrs. Carroll tossed uneasily. She had prayed with all her faith for her friend's recovery, and that her friend's boy would be given strength to bear it, if the prayer could not be granted. Unable to sleep,

she gave up the attempt at last, and throwing a dressing gown over her shoulders stole into the boys' room. They were both lying quiet and she was about to tiptoe out again, when two wide-open eyes stared up at her from a white face.

"What is the matter with my mother?" the boy demanded simply. He spoke in a low tone for fear of disturbing Carter. "Don't try to keep it from me, please: it's no use."

Kneeling beside him she told him of the grave illness that had come upon his mother. His father had summoned one of London's best physicians, a man with a world-wide reputation. They must wait and hope that God would spare her life. Her own tears fell as she put her arms about the poor boy and smoothed the thick dark hair with loving touch.

And she did comfort him, hard as the trial was. The boy's words before she left him more than repaid her for any care or inconvenience his visit to them was causing.

"Thank you," he said softly, as she got up to go. "I don't see how I could bear it if I were any place else than here!"

Fortunately he did not have to bear it long. By noon the next day a cablegram brought the joyful news that the crisis was over, and Mrs. Armstrong was on the road to recovery. But short as the time had been Sid showed the effects of the strain for several days. He realized more than ever before, what his mother was to him.

CHAPTER XVIII

Outside the Hook

SEPTEMBER and even early October were usually quite summery on Staten Island, but this year autumn appeared determined to claim her full quota of days. It seemed as though she were pointing an accusing finger at the calendar and saying: "You've escaped me before, but I've got the best of summer this year! See the leaves! Hear the wind! Feel the bite in my air! Now, do you believe me?"

The weather had been threatening for almost a week, the sky filled with angry-looking clouds, the wind giving a fair imitation of its wintry howl, but the first Saturday in October seemed to promise a fair day.

"I guess that big coast storm the weather bureau has been predicting for the last few days has lost its way," Mr. Carroll remarked, looking up from his paper. Minnie was putting breakfast on the table, and he had been reading the weather report while he waited. The boys had not yet appeared. "They've had the storm signals out, though, and have sent warnings to all the vessels they can reach by wireless, so they must be expecting it all right. I wish I knew what to depend on."

"Why?" Mrs. Carroll was lighting the alcohol lamp under her coffee percolator, but she stopped and regarded

him curiously until the match gave her a warm reminder. "What difference does it make to you, pray? Are you starting on a sea voyage, or are you afraid the ferries will founder?" she inquired mischievously.

"Neither, my dear; but Atkins was in my office yesterday — you've heard me speak of him: he's the head of one of the big towing companies, you remember. He offered to take the boys out beyond Sandy Hook to-day, if they care to go."

"Care to go? Why, they will be simply wild about it!"

"I'd like to go myself," Mr. Carroll remarked longingly. "There's fine deep-sea fishing right from the tug. They may have to wait about for their tow, he says, so he offered to put me off on Romer Shoals Light if I preferred fishing from the rocks, but I hardly feel as though I can spare the whole day. I might take the boys over, though, and let them see one of the fire-boats. That will give the weather time to make up its mind. Atkins says his boat does n't go out until eleven. Don't say anything about that part of the trip until we decide."

Just then Carter and Sid hurried in, followed by Dixie Doodle, and the family sat down to breakfast.

"I suppose you boys are pretty busy these days," Mr. Carroll remarked carelessly, after the blessing was over.

"Yes, sir," Sid answered. "The days don't seem half long enough, especially Saturdays."

"I know how it used to be," Mr. Carroll agreed, his eyes twinkling. "School breaks into a day dreadfully, does n't it? I suppose that makes Saturday doubly pre-

cious; but I was going to suggest that if you have the time — "

"Oh! please don't ask anything for to-day, father," Carter broke in imploringly. "We're going to ride over to Bull's Head after apples. Saturday 's the one day that nobody interferes with, thank goodness!"

"Oh! I see!" Mr. Carroll exclaimed meekly. "I won't make that suggestion after all. Good-bye, boys: be good to yourselves. Good-bye, lady!" He kissed his wife affectionately as he spoke, a caress he had never forgotten in all the years he had been married. "Meet me at the Battery at nine-thirty sharp, dear. If you get there before I do, wait for me on the boat."

"On the boat?" Carter repeated. "What boat?"

"The fire-boat, dear," Mrs. Carroll answered carelessly, after a significant look from her husband.

"But what's mother going to do on a fire-boat?" Carter persisted.

"Just explore it, that's all. They are really quite interesting, and so is the house."

"But I want to explore it, too," the boy began vehemently. "Why, Sid and I have just been crazy to go over a fire-boat, have n't we, Sid?"

Sid nodded eagerly, but Mr. Carroll walked towards the door, remarking casually: "Yes, they are interesting. Good-bye!"

"But father," Carter hurried after him, and laid a detaining hand on his arm; "can't we go, too? Please!"

"On Saturday, precious Saturday, that no one interferes with, thank goodness? I could n't think of

suggesting even a visit to a fire-boat on that day, son."

"Oh, you know I did n't mean it. I — "

"All right, Car," his father dropped his teasing manner. "I would like to break you of your habit of jumping to conclusions, that's all. Meet me at South Ferry at nine forty-five. Wear something warm: the wind seems pretty sharp in spite of the sunshine."

Mrs. Carroll and the boys were on hand at the appointed place promptly. As soon as Mr. Carroll appeared they walked over to the fire-boat station. The "New Yorker" was at its dock and there was not much onit that escaped Carter's and Sid's keen eyes that morning, from the many hose with their brilliantly polished nozzles, to the powerful engines. The captain goodhumoredly answered their numberless questions.

"No wonder the fire-boats can put out such big fires," Sid commented admiringly. "These pumps throw tremendous streams: we watched them at the cotton docks' fire."

"And there's never any lack of water, remember," the captain added. "That's the advantage of being able to pump salt water."

From the boat they went to the fire-boat headquarters close by. One of the firemen explained the signals, and the boys found it quite exciting sliding down the brass pole in answer to imaginary emergency calls.

Mr. Carroll looked at his watch and consulted his wife in a hurried aside, then the two examined the sky critically.

"Oh, I suppose it will be all right," she replied, in answer to his low-toned question. "They may not have such an opportunity again, so I hate to deprive them of it. I 'll be a little anxious though. I wish you were going too."

"But I 'm not storm-proof," he replied teasingly. "I 'm sure we can trust the boys. Neither of them seems inclined to attempt foolhardy stunts. Come on! We 'll have to hurry! We are to meet Atkins at ten forty-five."

As they walked along the Battery, Mr. Atkins himself overtook them. He was a bluff, good-humored man with a breezy, decisive way of speaking that appealed to the boys even before they found out who he was. Mr. Carroll introduced him to his wife.

"Mr. Atkins, dear."

"Glad to know you, Mrs. Carroll; glad to know you! These yours?" he inquired shaking hands with the boys as he spoke.

"One is ours and one is a loan," she replied. "We have been inspecting the 'New Yorker.' "

"So you 're interested in boats, are you?" he asked turning to the boys. "That 's good! very good! Won't you join the party, Mrs. Carroll? I 've promised your husband some first-rate fishing."

"Party?" "Fishing?" The boys stared at him in surprise.

"My boat 's about ready to start," Mr. Atkins continued. "Glad to have you if you 'll come."

"Not I, thank you!" Mrs. Carroll shook her head decidedly. "Why, our ferries are almost too much for

me on a rough day, so you can understand what a poor sailor I am. Imagine me outside the Hook! I went out one day during the yacht races several years ago. Mr. Carroll and I were guests on one of the revenue cutters. That once was enough for me! I had always imagined that a boat at anchor was fairly quiet, but I learned differently that day. It was rather rough weather and we went up, up, up, then down, down, down, until I began to fear that the boat would get absent-minded and turn a somersault. No, thank you, Mr. Atkins! But the boys might —"

"Oh!" Carter and Sid exclaimed almost as one voice. Outside Sandy Hook! It seemed too good to be true. They looked at Mr. Atkins, their whole hearts in their eyes. Suppose he only meant the invitation for Mr. and Mrs. Carroll.

"Oh! I 'm depending on the boys," he said, laughing at their eager faces. "I 'll take good care of them."

"It is very kind of you," Mrs. Carroll answered simply. "If I were only sure of the weather —"

"Don't worry!" he assured her lightly. "We 're about due for a blow, but the 'Invincible' is worthy of her name. I 've yet to see the storm she 's afraid to poke her nose into. Ocean going tugs, you know, are built to stand the roughest weather. Come on, boys!"

Mrs. Carroll went on towards the ferry after giving Carter strict injunctions to return home as soon as they landed at the Battery. Mr. Carroll left for his office, and the boys accompanied Mr. Atkins on board the tug and were introduced to the captain.

"I 've brought you a couple of passengers, Mac. They 'd like to go out with you to-day if they won't be in the way."

The captain, a good-humored blonde giant whom the boys liked immediately, hesitated for a moment.

"Looks a bit nasty over there, sir," he said finally. "Might have our hands full outside." He glanced uncertainly towards the boys who were feeling decidedly crestfallen, as their faces plainly showed. "But they 'll be all right if they 're not afraid of rough weather," he added kindly.

At this they brightened up and assured him that they were afraid of nothing; and before the tug had passed the Statue of Liberty they had scraped acquaintance with all the crew, and explored the craft from stem to stern. She was powerfully built and seemed to justify her owner's faith in her staunchness.

Mr. Atkins himself was not on board, but the captain had taken the boys in charge. As they steamed down the Narrows close to the Staten Island side, Carter pointed out their church, their school, and even the house itself. But before they reached the forts talking had become somewhat difficult owing to the rising wind.

"Just look at South Beach!" Carter shouted in Sid's ear, pointing back towards the shore as they were opposite the Quarantine Islands. "Don't look much like bathing there now, does it? Whew! that wave must have gone clear over the board walk!"

"If it 's this rough here in the lower bay, won't it be

a corker outside the Hook, though?" Sid shouted back exultingly.

Both boys had put on the heavy sweaters which they had objected so strenuously to bringing with them. But they had not then been told of this part of the day 's program. The captain appeared as they were speaking, with two oilskin outfits over his arm.

"Here, my boys, put these on, and keep on this side of the pilot house, do you understand? This wind is a zephyr compared to the blow that 's on outside. I promised Mr. Atkins I 'd take care of you, and I 'll spank you like a father if you don't mind." But a jolly laugh and twinkling eyes took the edge off the threat. The boys were glad to have the slickers which covered them from head to heel. The oilskin caps fitted down closely over their heads, and were provided with protecting capes. The wind was driving the fine spray even to the upper deck where they were standing, but they were now impervious to it.

As they flew past one of the lighthouses built on a small rocky island set in a wide waste of water, Carter turned to the captain and remarked: "Must be slow, living in a little dot of a place like that. I don't see what they find to do."

"Keeping the light in order takes some time," the captain answered. "They find other things to do, too. Why, that fellow there raises all his own vegetables."

The boys eyed the rocky island in utter astonishment. It was so small that the substantial base of the light tower almost completely covered it.

"But I don't see how," Sid exclaimed.

"From the tender, my boy, from the tender!" And the captain guffawed loudly at his own joke. "You boys bit first-rate, did n't you? Why, sons, that 's a standing joke out here: almost as old as the Hook itself. Joking aside, though, you ought to take a trip in one of those lighthouse tenders. You 'd enjoy it first-rate. Mr. Atkins could get you a pass, I reckon; but they 're not easy to get. Here comes a liner," he added, pointing to a majestic steamship that was almost abreast of them. In spite of the gale, its rails were crowded with passengers. "Guess those fellows are glad enough to get in. They 'd have to wait outside if this had been fog instead of wind. It 's no joke taking a steamer like that through the channel in a storm. This kind of weather 's hard on the officers, but it 's easy on the commissary department: dining-room saves money every time. And that reminds me," he added chuckling as he consulted his watch; " are you fellows pretty good sailors? Let me see! If a man gets greenery-yallery about the gills he 's not goin' to be keen after his grub. Could n't eat a bite of lunch about this time, could you?"

The boys assured him that they could, and proved it to him after they were seated at the table. The "bite of lunch" was, in reality, a hearty dinner, but they both ate with undiminished appetites even though the dishes were dancing jigs against the guard rails, while the table itself seemed bent on touching the ceiling of the cabin whenever a great wave struck them.

By the time dinner was over they had pushed through

the channel from the lower bay and the swell of the Atlantic was making itself felt: not the dimpling, smiling expanse trimmed with gay little white-caps and dotted with pleasure-craft, which they had often beheld from the Coney Island boats, but a surging, pounding ocean whose great waves towered threateningly above the tug making it appear the veriest shell on its angry bosom. Huge green mountains of water rose around them, each one seeming about to crush them in its downward rush, but the tug cut through them head on, now high, now low, sending the angry foam flying hissing from her bow, and leaving a wide wake of whitened water behind her. The spray rained down on deck making the boys more than grateful for their seamen's rig.

"There 'll be something doing to-day," the captain assured them. "If my tow don't show up pretty quick we 'll scud for cover ourselves. At the rate it 's blowing now we 'll be in for the real article in the way of weather in an hour or so. You won't find the 'Invincible' or any other tug cruisin' around out here just for the fun of the thing. We 'll — "

He broke off suddenly, and seizing a powerful marine glass that hung just within the window of the pilot house, he gazed intently in the direction of the coast.

"The blame fool!" he muttered wrathfully. "What does he think he 's doin', anyhow! He 'll get all that 's a' comin' to him pretty soon, if he don't watch out! She 's in a mighty ticklish position already. She 'll strike as sure as shootin' if he don't put about."

"She" referred to a bark rigged vessel between the

tug and the coast. The captain studied her movements intently for a few moments, then passed the glass to the boys but reclaimed it almost immediately. They were near enough to the struggling vessel, however, to follow its movements with the naked eye.

They learned later that the vessel was the "Molly Pitcher" bound from Savannah to Perth Amboy with a cargo of lumber and railroad ties. She had run into the full strength of the gale after picking up the light at Navesink Highlands.

"There! I thought so!" the Captain shouted angrily. "No! she 's off again! It 's more good luck than she deserves. That captain there would risk his boat, to say nothing of the lives of his crew, trying to make a run for harbor, rather than waste a day or two weatherin' it out at sea. That surf shows him how nigh he is to the shoals but he 's in for it now. In fair weather he c 'd make a close shave of it, probably, but in this wind — well, it 's a reg'lar sailor's gamble. He 's making a plucky run for it, I must say. Mebbe he 'll — no! by thunder! she 's done for!"

Even while he was speaking the bark stopped in its headlong career, gave a decided bump, lurched, then bumped again. At the second shock the two forward masts went by the board. The crew immediately let go both port and starboard anchors. At first they dug into the sand, but the heave and the swing with which the doomed ship gave way to the head seas soon showed that the anchors were dragging. By degrees the sailors paid out the cable, a hundred feet at a time, but it only

"At the second shock the two forward masts went by the board."
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brought her up for a few moments: the terrific gale that now swept down upon her soon caused her to drag again. It was only a question of minutes: even the boys could see that her position was hopeless. As they gazed horror-stricken with the pity of it, they saw the sailors on the bark climb into the rigging and lash themselves to the remaining mast.

Even before she struck, the life-savers at Sandy Hook were out in their power boat which was supposed to withstand any gale. But the staunch little boat for once found herself unable to make headway after leaving the shelter of the inner beach, so she was taken in tow by the "Invincible." Together they fought their way as near as possible to the wreck, but after several attempts to reach her they were forced to turn back.

It was during the last of these attempts that both tug and lifeboat barely escaped shipwreck themselves, and the captain, realizing the utter hopelessness of the situation, and unwilling to endanger the lives of his crew needlessly, gave up the struggle to reach the bark. The boys, watching with tense faces, understood the seriousness of their situation, but in the excitement it seemed of no importance whatever. They understood afterwards the courage or indifference that comes to men in the face of grave danger. As the tug put about, both boys sent up an involuntary prayer for help from above for the crew of the doomed vessel; human aid was powerless.

Meanwhile the life-savers on shore were trying to fire a line over the wreck. Their gun was one of the most

powerful in the service, but again and again the line fell short. It was almost an hour later, an hour of anguished impotence on the part of the watchers, that a momentary lull in the force of the gale permitted the shot to carry the line within reach of the shipwrecked sailors, who made it fast to the only mast left standing. With almost incredible speed the breeches buoy was rigged up. At first the men came from the wreck singly, but the bark was fast breaking up and the margin of safety became shorter and shorter, so that finally two men at a time had to crowd into the buoy. The added weight made the line sag so that the men were dragged through the heavy combing almost from the moment they left the ship's side, and were only partly conscious when they reached shore.

The "Invincible" received the rescued sailors after their first needs had been ministered to at the Life-Saving Station. Neither Carter nor Sid ever forgot one incident that occurred just after the rescue. The men were bruised and chilled from their terrible experience, but two of them resolutely refused the stimulant offered them by the life-savers.

"It 's whiskey, my lads," one of the rescuers urged. " It 'll warm you up."

One of the men simply waved it away, too weak to utter a sound. The other was able to speak audibly, however.

"Can't! Temperance man!"

For an instant the life-savers, strong men as they were, inured to danger, stared at the two in astonishment,

then they joined in a rousing cheer in honor of the courage the men displayed.

As the "Invincible" ploughed its way up the lower bay, and through the Narrows into the comparatively quiet waters of the upper harbor, the boys had little to say even to each other. The grim reality of the lives of the men "that go down to the sea in ships," and of the Life-Saving Corps, was brought forcibly home to them. In the last few hours they had witnessed acts of heroism which in other callings would have brought forth unstinted praise, yet in these strenuous followers of the sea were passed by unnoticed.

Meanwhile there was keen anxiety at the Carrolls'. As the gale increased in violence Mrs. Carroll's fears kept pace with it. After all, the weather bureau knew its business: she mentally begged pardon for her doubts on the subject. She blamed herself severely for allowing the boys to go at all when there was the least uncertainty. And she was responsible to Sid's mother and father, too, for her care of their boy. If she had only been firm right at the start, and refused to consider the trip!

By the time the five forty-five boat came in, bringing Mr. Carroll with it, she had worked herself into a fever of anxiety and remorse.

"Why did n't you wait for them?" she asked irritably.

"Wait for them?" he echoed. He had expected to find them at home, but he managed to conceal the fact and made light of her fears. He felt troubled, however, as he remembered how the ferry had tossed about, and recalled the words of one of the deck hands: "Worst

blow for years! There 'll be plenty of wrecks piled up along the Jersey shore before it 's through with us. I don't envy the tugs that have to go out to-day! If the wind 's cuttin' loose in here, what 's it doin' outside, d'ye suppose!" But he kept his fears to himself.

"They 've probably stopped at the Aquarium," he said, seizing the first pretext that offered.

"The Aquarium!" Mrs. Carroll's voice had a sharp ring that was new to it. "The Aquarium closed two hours ago. They surely ought to be in by this time unless —"

"I 'll go over again," Mr. Carroll interrupted hastily. "It 's really foolish though. Two great boys like Carter and Sid don't need an escort from the Battery; but as long as you feel anxious I 'm willing to go back."

Indeed he was more than willing. He thought the ferry — one of Staten Island's handsome new fleet — would never reach its slip. Before the gates were pushed aside he had leaped over, much to the disgust of the deck-hand, and rushed into the Ship News Office next door.

But there was no news and he spent almost an hour wandering about the Battery between the tug's landing and the wireless station as restlessly as Mrs. Carroll at home was hurrying from window to door, then back to the window again. He telephoned her twice, but neither message brought other comfort save the fact that "no news is good news." As the hours went by, the long strain told upon her. The evening paper which Mr. Carroll had tossed on the rack, gave an account of the havoc the storm had wrought along the coast. It was a dismal recital with the usual "scare-heads." As she

read it she sobbed heart brokenly, leaning against the telephone table, while Dixie Doodle pressed close to her side, looking up into her face as though he understood and sympathized with her. Minnie, in the kitchen beyond, polished away absent-mindedly at a huge potato she had started to peel, under the impression that it was a piece of the silver she was polishing in the afternoon when first her mistress began to be alarmed.

"They 're drownded! They 're drownded!" she murmured brokenly, burying her face in the roller towel to keep back her sobs. "Oh! the poor missus! the poor missus!"

But the next minute she heard Mrs. Carroll's uncontrollable grief, and forgetting self in her faithful ministry, flew to the door to offer comfort.

"Don't cry, ma'am! Please don't! Them tugs is awful strong! Jim says you never hear of 'em gettin' hurt like other boats because they ain't built that way. I'll just bet that one 's found somethin' that needs to be pulled up the bay an' it's havin' extry hard work on 'count of the wind. Just listen to that, will you!" as a blast rattled the windows on the side of the house nearest the water. "You can't expect it to make good time such a night as this. They're grand strong boats, though! Jim knows!"

And Mrs. Carroll felt comforted in spite of herself, by the girl's assurance. Nevertheless she stayed right at the telephone table. Her husband had not called her up for almost an hour. Any minute now might bring her the welcome message; she wanted to be ready for it.

Meanwhile Mr. Carroll again sought the wireless station, and asked news of the tug. A new man had come on duty since his last visit.

"The 'Invincible'?" the man repeated, shifting his eyes from Mr. Carroll's anxious gaze. "Er — oh, yes — the 'Invincible'! She's a pretty good tug, sir! a pretty good tug! One of the best in the harbor, sir!"

"What have you heard?" Mr. Carroll demanded fiercely. "Out with it, man."

"Well, the last message we received said that the 'Invincible' and the life-boat were both — "

"Well?"

"On the shoals!" the man answered, his face showing the pity he felt. "Who's on board her that you know?"

"My boy and my friend's boy who is in our care!" Mr. Carroll replied, grasping the back of the chair before him to steady himself.

The man reached out his hand, but said nothing because he felt that no words of his would bring comfort.

"Wait a minute," he exclaimed after an instant's silence. "There may be later news! I'll see what I can find out for you. You can't trust every report you hear, sir. The operators lose their heads occasionally just like other folks."

To Mr. Carroll the few moments of his absence seemed months of terrible dread, but when the man came back one glance into his face was enough: he was fairly beaming.

"Both boats safe!" he shouted in his excitement. "The 'Invincible' is all right, I tell you! She had a

close shave but she's all right! Sit down, sir! You're all done up!"

"Thank God!" Mr. Carroll exclaimed devoutly, as he accepted the offered chair. "When do you think she'll get in?"

"Oh! not for some time yet," was the cheerful reply. "But as long as she's safe it does n't matter."

"No, it does n't matter! I must telephone my wife. You — you're sure —"

"Sure!" the man replied heartily. "She's bringing in the sailors rescued from a wreck. This is au-then-tic!" he ended with a flourish.

Mr. Carroll shook hands with him and hurried to telephone the joyful news to his wife. Not that he mentioned a word of the previous message: he knew too well how hard it would be for her. It was bad enough for him. Even though the wireless message seemed positive, an occasional doubt crept into his mind as he tramped along the sea-wall of the Battery straining his eyes through the darkness for the first sight of the tug. When she finally puffed up, he was fairly weak from the anxiety of his long vigil. He had had nothing to eat since his light lunch at twelve o'clock, and his unwonted fast was making itself felt.

"Thank heaven!" he cried earnestly, rushing up to the boys before they reached the dock. "I've paced the Battery steadily for the last four hours except when I've been in to get your mother on the 'phone. We'll have a bloated bill for city calls this month, all right," he ended with a weak attempt at his customary light-

ness; but the hug with which he greeted each of the boys belied his words. It seemed as though he could not bear to let them out of reach of his hand.

"Come again, boys!" the captain urged them heartily as they left the tug twelve hours after boarding it. "Guess you had n't much idea what you were in for to-day, had you? But they're grit clear through, both of them," he commended heartily, speaking to Mr. Carroll. "Never turned an eyelash when we expected to go down any minute. Why, I've seen grown men lose their heads and shriek like crazy loons in a squeeze like that; but these fellows — well, they're all right!" And he returned Mr. Carroll's hand clasp with one which almost brought the tears to his eyes.

"Hurry, boys!" Mr. Carroll started off on a run. "We can make the eleven-thirty if we rush. Your poor mother's a wreck if the 'Invincible' is n't. She's consigned you both to watery graves a dozen times to-day. Go on and get the tickets, Car! I'll just have time to call her up again. She's waited long enough, poor little woman!" He had begun speaking lightly to disguise his own genuine relief and thankfulness, but he ended soberly enough.

For the next few days the story of the wreck and the rescue was repeated again and again, until the rest of the "S. I. G.'s" could give almost as accurate a description as the eyewitnesses themselves. Every detail had to be told and retold, and Carter and Sid answered questions, both pertinent and otherwise, until they felt exhausted. The newspapers for the next day were

eagerly seized and the accounts of the storm and the wreck — "our wreck" as they called it — were read, and commented upon.

"She did n't back away after she grounded," Johnny Porter asserted confidently, in reference to one of the printed statements. "She was being driven along by the wind too fast to back away. Say, Car, did n't her forward masts go over right away?"

"Yep!" was the laconic reply.

"And this says: 'She quivered from stem to stern as though indignantly demanding the right of the shoal to intercept her in her mad rush for safety. Then the gale lifted her almost bodily from her resting place only to send her crashing back with cruel force. This time she seemed to bow to the inevitable!' Humph! guess this fellow thinks he's writing a book!"

"Or else he's got to fill up space," Arthur interpolated. "You know those reporters in papers like that old yellow have to use all the big words they can. That 's the way they impress people. My uncle's a reporter. He says that class of readers wants to have their feelings harrowed, so they harrow them, but if they use words that they can understand, the people don't think they are getting their money's worth. Funny, is n't it? This fellow talks as though the ship was alive!"

"But you don't understand," Carter explained quietly. "You can't possibly understand a thing like that unless you see it. Honestly, Art, the boat seemed like a live creature, did n't she, Sid? She acted like an animal that was caught and was struggling to escape, and when

it found it could n't, it tried to fight it out. I'll never forget it! But it would have been ten times more awful if the life savers had n't managed to get the rope for the breeches buoy over! The captain of the bark would n't leave until the very last. They were just lifting him out of the buoy when the bark crashed over and most of it disappeared."

Mrs. Carroll sent an urgent invitation to the captain of the tug, and on one of his off-days the blond giant came over for dinner. Minnie had "put in her best licks," as Carter expressed it; the dinner she served was a "gastronomic triumph," in the words of Mr. Carroll. Whether it was or not the captain evidently enjoyed it, but the poor man was scarcely allowed to finish it before he was surrounded by boys; boys who were, in reality, animated question marks. But he seemed to enjoy this part of the evening as much as he did the dinner.

"Had n't you better signal for a wrecking-tug, ma'am?" he asked Mrs. Carroll, quizzically, when the time came for him to go back to New York. "Just hang a flag upside down, will you? I hate to fly the distress signal, but I guess I'll have to be rescued an' towed to port!"

Before he made his escape he had accepted, provisionally, seven pressing invitations for dinner. It was weeks before the nautical flavor entirely disappeared from the club's conversation, and the events of the day were never forgotten by two witnesses.

CHAPTER XIX

The Prize Story

GREAT PRIZE STORY CONTEST

TRY IT, BOYS! TRY IT, GIRLS!
Twenty fine prizes for the winners! The fifty best stories to be published in the Story Page of our Saturday papers! Stories must be written by boys and girls not over sixteen years of age, without help from any one. Write only on one side of the paper. Put your name and address in a sealed envelope and send it with the manuscript. Stories must be in before November 15th. Prizes will be awarded according to merit. No pull! No favoritism! Go in and win!

First Prize	$25	Fourth Prize	$10
Second Prize	$20	Fifth Prize	$5
Third Prize	$15	Next Fifteen Prizes	$2 Each

About the middle of October one of the largest of the New York papers started this prize story contest. The judges were chosen from the five boroughs of Greater New York, and Staten Island boys and girls were especially interested because a favorite High School teacher

was selected to represent Richmond, their own borough. Each story had to be accompanied by a coupon cut from the paper, but the contest was absolutely fair; merit, not votes, would win the prizes. Many of the boys were obliged to purchase an extra coupon: the original one became too thin and worn from constant handling.

Carter was not fond of writing. Even his letters were neglected, and Mrs. Carroll worried over his indifference as she wanted him to be careful about such matters. When she learned, by accident, that he had not yet acknowledged the cheque for five dollars that his Aunt Alice had sent him soon after he reached home in September, she was genuinely angry.

"A gentleman always acknowledges a gift," she informed him gravely, "and acknowledges it promptly, too. He would as soon think of neglecting his finger-nails as of neglecting such a common courtesy."

This was a double-barbed shaft, and she knew it; for Carter had not yet reached the age when a boy spends lengthy periods in manicuring and neck-tie arranging. In fact she wished he would devote more of his time to these very things.

Aunt Alice was Mrs. Carroll's only sister, a "rising young author" as one newspaper expressed it. She had won some fame as a writer of short stories and had a successful novel to her credit. She was full of fun, and although very fond of her only nephew, she could not resist teasing him occasionally.

"Car's so peppery," she used to say, "you get your

money's worth every time! If he'd only learn to take a joke he would n't be teased so much."

Aunt Alice had been abroad for several months but was expected home before Thanksgiving. Mrs. Carroll had written her about the latchstring joke and how Carter had taken it. She answered that if he kept on in that way he would n't be any fun at all; one of the reasons why she was anxious to reach home was to get a "rise" out of her spunky nephew! But in spite of her teasing, she loved him dearly, and was constantly sending him gifts and remembrances, books, games, or things to wear, so Mrs. Carroll had good reason to feel provoked when she found that the five-dollar cheque had not even been acknowledged.

"You may spend your afternoons in the house until that letter is written," she commanded sternly.

"At homes" did not appeal to Carter, so he set to work at once and posted the letter that very day for fear his mother would ask to see it. It was very much to the point, and if brevity is the soul of wit, it was witty indeed. Certainly it was business-like.

"DEAR AUNT ALICE —
"Thanks for the cheque. I spent it.
"CARTER."

Mr. and Mrs. Carroll were both interested in the story contest and urged the boys to enter it. They consented willingly, but the prizes appealed to them more than the means by which they were to be won. Sid wisely decided to get the agony over as soon as possible. He set to work

in earnest and stayed indoors for several afternoons in succession, while Carter was out enjoying himself. By the end of the week he had his story finished, copied, and posted to the Prize Story Editor. All he would say in answer to Carter's questions was that it was a "winner, sure!"

Carter also intended to "buckle down" — to-morrow! His father often declared that he must have Spanish blood in his veins, because he was devoted to the "mañana" which the Spaniards quote so constantly. He found, however, that the "S. I. G.'s" were all following Sid's example and working away over their contributions, each hoping that even if he failed to win a prize, his story might be one of the fifty chosen for publication. By the end of the week he, too, caught the contagion, or else he found the afternoons lonely: at any rate he decided to follow their example and set to work on his first literary effort.

Aunt Alice reached home earlier than they thought she would, and the very day that he chose to begin his first flight in authorship she came in for dinner. She and Carter's grandfather lived near the fort in a charming old mansion with large grounds, overlooking the Narrows. It was some distance from the Carrolls', but their great red motor covered the intervening space in an incredibly short time.

"I always tell Matthews to go as fast as he can without being arrested," she explained laughingly, when Mrs. Carroll displayed anxiety over the speed with which the chauffeur had swept up the block. "Of

course I don't care to decorate my car with one of the mounted police even though they do look stunning in their new uniforms."

"You know, Aunt Allie," Carter began the instant he had asked the blessing, "I really need a prize."

"Why, I thought that was something new you had added to the blessing," Aunt Alice said with a teasing laugh. "It was certainly all in the same breath."

"I have n't a cent saved up for Christmas," the boy went on, for once ignoring her teasing. "Besides, I want a phonograph. Johnny Porter's father has one that's a dandy, is n't it, Sid? It's as good as the opera. You can hear Caruso, and cats howling on the back fence, and —"

"Dear! dear! dear!" Aunt Alice interrupted, apparently much impressed. "Cats and Caruso! How interesting!"

"Oh, I don't mean in one record, Aunt Allie," Carter flashed forth impatiently. "They have a whistling record too, that's a perfect beauty, and one with roosters crowing, and dogs barking, and an Irishman talking at a political meeting. They have dance music, too. We could have a party every week if we had a phonograph."

"My son," Mrs. Carroll began gravely, "I asked you to try for one of the prizes, but if it means 'cats on the back fence' and 'a party every week,' I think I'll withdraw my request."

"Please stop joking!" Carter snapped impatiently. It provoked him because even Sid was laughing. " I don't want Aunt Allie to help me, but just to tell me how she

starts to write her stories, because I'm going to begin mine to-night."

"Why, honey-boy," Aunt Allie began, knowing well that he particularly hated to be called by this relic of his baby-days, "it's as easy as falling off a log. You just catch your idea — a nice plump one, you know, because the editors don't care for thin plots — and there you are!"

Carter had a queer expression on his boyish face as he listened. He did not understand in the least, but he hated to confess it. Aunt Alice realized his state of mind perfectly and kept on out of pure mischief.

"Do you remember how to make rabbit-pie, Car? No? Your memory needs attention, honey! Well, first catch your rabbit! Same with a story — first catch your idea, then dress it up in good clothes, and send it visiting. But don't spend the prize money until it comes, remember. Even a good fat idea dressed in the finest of garments, sometimes goes to waste — I mean the waste-basket!"

Carter saw that help from this quarter was hopeless so he decided to go ahead by himself. Just as they rose from the dinner table, the telephone bell rang and he hurried to answer it. It was the "I.'s" asking the boys over for some games and a chafing-dish spread later. Sid, standing close to the 'phone, heard the message distinctly.

"We have some oysters to cream, and we 're going to have hot chocolate and cake, too," Ida explained alluringly. "You and Sid come over early, won't you?"

"All ri —" Carter stopped suddenly, hesitated, then regretfully changed his answer.

"I 'm awfully sorry, 'I.', but I 've got to set to work on that story to-night. All the rest of the boys have sent theirs in. We 'll come some other time. Good —"

"'Why don't you speak for yourself, John?'" Sid interrupted promptly; and pushing Carter aside he said: "Thank you, 'I.' — I 'll come! Ask Johnny, why don't you? Good-bye! See you later!"

"I like your decision of character, Mr. Carroll," Sid informed him angrily as he hung up the receiver. "Perhaps hereafter you 'll allow me to decide about my own invitations, however. You forget that I missed that motor ride with your aunt the day I was finishing my story, but I don't seem to remember that you stayed home to keep me company."

This was such an unusual outburst from quiet, self-controlled Sid that Carter stared at him speechless, while Mr. Carroll in the library beyond, remarked in a low tone: "Sid 's exactly right! Carter acts as though he owns him, body and soul. I 'm glad the boy asserts himself occasionally. Carter thinks the world and all of him, but he 's too dictatorial."

"Does he take after his mother or his father?" Aunt Alice asked mischievously; but Mr. Carroll declined to answer.

After Sid left for the "I.'s" Carter got out a large yellow pad and sharpened half a dozen pencils ready for his evening's task, then opened a box of peanut brittle and laid it on the desk beside him. He forgot that he

had had a long bicycle ride after school, and had spent over an hour, afterwards, on his lessons, so was in no condition for mental work. He ate a piece of the candy, and thought hard. Then he ate another piece minus the thinking process. Like the hermit, "sometimes he set an' thought, an' sometimes he jest set!" During the third piece of candy he decided upon his title, — "A Brave Boy."

But it did not suit him after he had written it down, so glancing through several of the current magazines he found that the titles seemed to be longer, and more imposing, and changed his to "The Boy Who was Courageous."

After several more pieces of candy munched slowly as an aid to thought, he began to write without even the ghost of an idea as to his plot.

"It was snowing hard. The month was December when snow is expected. The air was so filled with the fine, feathery flakes that the traveler could with difficulty discern the road."

He stopped at this point, lost in admiration of his last sentence: it had the true story ring about it, he felt. Much encouraged he went on.

"The weather had been promising snow for some time and now it was keeping its word with a vengeance, for the snow fell steadily, covering the streets and the pavements and the bushes and even the fences themselves with its fine powdery blanket. The boys made a great snow fort because they had plenty of material at hand. It was a very cold snow, too, just the kind of snow that piles up into huge drifts that are absolutely impassable — "

He stopped at this point to rest his hand and read over what he had written, then just to relieve his eyes he shut them for an instant, and before he knew it he was sound asleep.

Dixie Doodle jumped up on the desk and finished the bits of peanut brittle left in the box with the greatest enjoyment; he, as well as his master, liked candy.

Mrs. Carroll and Aunt Alice came in not long afterwards. The latter bent over Carter's shoulder and examined his work.

"Poor young author!" she said softly. "He 's stuck fast in that impassable drift of his!"

When Carter tried to go on with the story the next day he found that Aunt Alice's words were indeed true: having nothing to tell he could n't very well tell it!

"What on earth can I write about?" he asked his mother anxiously.

"I can't suggest a plot to you," she replied. "It would n't be fair if I did. If you enter the contest you must abide by its rules, and receive no help from anyone. You want to try for the prize honestly or not at all."

Just then Dixie came prancing into the room and capered about, tossing up a bit of paper he held in his mouth and deftly catching it again as it floated down. It was one of his "puppy-days" when he seemed possessed with mischievousness.

"You rascal!" Carter scolded. "That 's something from my book-shelf, I 'll warrant. Give it to me!"

But Dixie eluded his outstretched hand, and started

on a wild chase about the room. When he was finally captured only fragments remained of the paper. Carter looked at them angrily.

"That was my picture of the 'Invincible,' Mr. Dix! You ought to be punished! I drew that picture myself, just after the wreck, you —" He stopped abruptly, then went on in great excitement. "Gee whiz! that 's it! Why did n't I think of that before? It 's a true story and it 's exciting too. The boys certainly seemed to like it. Thank you, old boy: if I win a prize I 'll give you a share of it."

The next afternoon the "S. I. G.'s" whistled enticingly outside the house, but only Sid appeared in answer. Carter shouted down to him just as he was leaving: "Hey, Sid! Tell them I 'm engaged."

But before he set to work in earnest he called up his aunt.

"That you, Aunt Allie? This is Carter. Say, I 've caught an awfully nice plump idea, and I 'm going to dress it up in fine style. Me for a prize, Aunt Al! You wait and see! Whoop-la!" Then he rang off promptly before she had time to answer. He liked to tease occasionally himself.

The story was written and re-written several times until it suited him, then it was copied carefully and posted. After that he and Sid talked "story" morning, noon, and night, until Mr. Carroll rebelled.

"It 's worse than base-ball," he declared irritably. "I 'll turn into a prize-story myself, soon. Please don't mention that confounded contest again until the prizes

are awarded, do you understand? A few more meals with 'prize-story' sauce will drive me crazy!"

"Yes, sir," both boys replied meekly.

But the letter man on the block really bore the brunt of the affair. His route was packed with boys and girls who had entered the contest. Long before the awards could possibly be decided he was besieged with eager questions: "Any letter for me?" "Got something for me, to-day?" until the poor man felt as Mr. Carroll did, only more so. Many of the contestants even refused to start to school until after he had been around, and a number of tardy marks were directly traceable to the contest.

The excitement died down after a time, however, and the customary games and sports were resumed; but when Mrs. Carroll returned from her first club meeting after the stories were sent in, she was highly amused over something she had heard there. She went to the kitchen, and told the joke to Minnie who giggled over it heartily.

"Sure an' that 's just the boys all over, now ain't it?" she remarked admiringly. "They 're a great lot, them 'S. I. G.'s!'"

Then Mrs. Carroll called up Aunt Alice, and confided the story to her.

"Great minds run in the same channel!" was Aunt Allie's laughing comment.

That night while the boys were in their room getting ready for dinner, Mrs. Carroll repeated the joke for Mr. Carroll's benefit, first making him promise to keep it a secret.

"You remember those stories the boys sent in for the contest?" she asked, after he had assured her solemnly that wild horses should not drag it from him.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed, "I should say I do! We 're not in for another round of that, I hope!"

"Oh, no!" she hastened to relieve his fears; "you 're safe. But you know they agreed not to tell each other what they had written. They confided in their mothers, though, and to-day at the club, we ladies learned that every boy in the 'S. I. G.' told the same story!"

"No!" Mr. Carroll exclaimed in surprise, not in the least intending to be rude.

"But they did," she persisted.

"What story was it?" He was genuinely interested now. "It must have been a tremendously popular one."

"It was. I only hope those editors won't think they wrote the stories together."

"No danger of that, dear, because the very fact that they are about the same thing weakens their chances for a prize, don't you see?"

"That 's so! I 'm really glad of it, under the circumstances."

"But what was the great and only piece of fiction?" he demanded eagerly.

"It was n't fiction — it was fact!" she replied. "It was the story of 'Our Wreck'!"

CHAPTER XX

Troubles

THEY say that troubles never come singly, and in the case of the Carrolls it certainly proved true. Business conditions became worse, prices for living soared higher and higher, and Mr. Carroll grew more quiet, more unlike his usual jolly self each week. He seldom chatted with his wife or the boys as he used to do, and never joked. When he spoke at all it was in a tired, cross way, most unusual to him.

"Father is worried, Car," Mrs. Carroll explained. "Business is dull, and the money for several big contracts can't be collected yet because the strikes are delaying the work. Several people owe him money, too. Mr. Walton owes him several thousand, but his note is due this week, I believe, so that will tide things over at the office until the contracts can be finished. If it were not for the rent from the house I don't know what we would do just now. I 'm glad the new people are to come in so promptly. It will only be empty a week."

Mrs. Carroll referred to the house they owned. It was a handsome piece of property at the corner of the block, — a much larger house than the one they were renting — with wide piazzas, a conservatory, and beautiful grounds about it. A garage at the rear, and a tower at one corner of the house itself, appealed mightily to

Carter. Mrs. Carroll hoped that they could afford to occupy the house themselves in a year or two, because it would be such a good place for the boy. It had a tennis court of its own, at the back, and a smooth, well laid out croquet lawn at the side. But all these advantages, charming as they were, added to the cost of keeping the place in order, so for the present it was simply one of her cherished dreams.

The night after this conversation with Carter, Mr. Carroll, in house-coat and slippers was stretched out in the Morris chair before the library hearth. His paper lay unopened on his lap, and he was staring moodily into the glowing heart of the fire, his mind still filled with business worries. The noise of an engine rushing by roused him from his gloomy revery. A hook and ladder wagon followed, then a second engine.

"Better tell Minnie to draw some water," he advised, without looking up. "If it 's the cotton docks, or any big fire, we 'll be sure to need it. There 's not enough pressure to stand the increased demand. Carter!"

But Carter and Sid had both disappeared. Like most boys they could not resist a fire. They were off in search of it before there was any possibility of restraining commands. A moment later Carter came rushing in shouting at the top of his voice.

"It 's burning! It 's burning! I tell you it 's burning!"

"Stop that racket, Carter!" Mr. Carroll spoke sharply. The boy's excited entrance was far from soothing to his aching head.

"But I tell you it 's —"

"Car! Did you hear me, sir?" This time he was genuinely angry, not only because he was disturbed, but because both he and Mrs. Carroll were trying to break the boy of his habit of arguing and talking after he had been told to be quiet.

"But it 's OUR house!" Carter persisted, his voice shrill with excitement.

Mr. Carroll jumped up in such a hurry that his paper flew off his knee and landed in the grate where fortunately it was consumed without setting fire to the chimney. Not waiting to change either slippers or coat, he snatched a cap from the rack as he rushed through the hall and dashed off, slamming the door after him. Carter had pushed on ahead, with Dixie at his heels, and Mrs. Carroll and Minnie brought up the rear, the former crying miserably. How she loved that house! What good times she had planned in connection with it, in that indefinite "sometime!" She thought of the round tower room that was to be Carter's den, and the garage which would make a gymnasium, billiard-room, and workshop. It was almost too hard to bear.

The neighbors all seemed bound for the fire, too, but Mr. Carroll passed them. When he reached the corner where the firemen were busily stretching hose from the engines, he was roughly seized by the shoulder and thrust aside.

"Here, you! Keep back there! Can't go beyond the lines!"

"It 's my house," Mr. Carroll answered quietly, but the words made the fireman change his tone.

"All right, sir! Go ahead; only be careful. Fire got a big start before it was discovered. The care-taker just got out in time. Can't save the place I 'm afraid, sir. I 'm sorry."

Mr. Carroll thanked him briefly and went on. One glance was enough to show him that the man was right; the house could not possibly be saved. He began to help in the work of protecting the nearest roof. It was some distance away but the sparks were falling thick and fast. The flames lighted up the whole street.

It seemed as though there was a whole regiment of boys on hand. They kept dodging under the lines, getting in the way of the firemen, and crowding so close about the engines that the men could scarcely work. Finally one of the hose pipes sprung a leak, and ten or twelve of them were soaked to the skin before they could get out of the way. The water served to dampen their ardor, much to the relief of the fire-fighters.

When it was all over, Mr. and Mrs. Carroll walked home together. He never spoke a word on the way back, but when he reached the house he threw himself into his chair, and covering his face with his hands, groaned aloud. Mrs. Carroll had all she could do to restrain her own sobs, but she went up to him and put her arms about his shoulder, patting his head soothingly. He looked so white and ill that she was frightened.

"We ought to be thankful the house was empty, dear," she said gently. "The firemen think the care-taker must have stuffed a lot of trash into the grates after the family left, this afternoon, but he denies it, of

course. It would have been terrible if anyone had been hurt."

"Yes, I am thankful," he muttered brokenly. "You don't understand, dear. I deserve it, I know, but it 's hard for my family to have to suffer with me. I 'm afraid you 'll never forgive my carelessness, Eve. The fire insurance on the house was due last month, and I — never — paid — it!"

"Is that all?" she questioned cheerfully.

"All!" He looked at her as though he had not heard aright. "Yes, that 's all!" he added grimly. "It simply means that we lose every dollar that the house was worth, because we won't get one cent of insurance on it!"

"Oh no, it does n't!" she contradicted flatly, with a gay little laugh. "We 'll lose the rent from the house until we can build again, that 's all! I paid that insurance myself. The agent spoke to me about it one day last week. He said you had probably overlooked it, and he did n't like to bother you again."

"But how —"

"I had my birthday money that father and Alice sent me, and I was glad to use it in that way. Now will you cheer up?"

For answer he drew her down on his lap and kissed her.

"We 'll pull through all right after all," he said a moment later. "Walton's money is due to-morrow. It comes just in the nick of time, too. I must take his note over to the office with me. He 's not very hon — strict in business matters, I hear, but I did n't know it

when he asked me for the loan. He was having a hard time of it just then. I happened to have it to spare, and hated to refuse him. Since I 've learned more about him I 'm glad I insisted on his giving me a note. He tried hard at the time to make it a friendly loan. There were no witnesses, so it is fortunate I have his written promise."

"But he surely could n't refuse to pay a debt of that sort!" she exclaimed incredulously.

"He has evaded his debts before now, I am told, but he can't get out of this one. By the way, I'll take the note before I forget it. I left it in the small desk."

"The small desk!" she repeated, staring at him with frightened eyes. "Are you sure it was the small desk? Why, Winthrop, I cleared that desk out last month to make room for the boys' games. It was full of old receipts and cheques and things. I did n't know you kept any important papers in it."

Without a word Mr. Carroll hurried to the desk in question and began an anxious examination of its contents. Mrs. Carroll joined him, but her hands trembled so that she could hardly hold a paper. They searched the top and the drawers, not once, but many times. Then they moved out the desk and searched beneath it, but all to no purpose. No note of any kind was to be found.

"We must find it, I tell you," Mr. Carroll muttered harshly. "We've got to find it. That rascal may refuse to pay at all if I can't produce the evidence. We must find it!"

But they did not find it. They hunted through bureaus and book-cases, through the large desk in the library, and Carter's combination bookcase and desk in his own room. Late as it was Mr. Carroll went over to his office and searched there, although he knew, even as he did it, that he had left the note in the small desk at home.

After this, things were gloomier than ever. Mr. Carroll learned that his neighbor's reputation was even blacker than it had been painted. Mr. Walton jumped at the chance to evade payment.

"You know I lent you the money, Walton," Mr. Carroll said sternly. "It pulled you through a pretty tight place, too. Well, I'm in need of it now — badly in need. These two big contracts of mine have been delayed by the strikes and I must have money to tide me over until I can collect on them, or it means failure for me. You owe the money!"

Mr. Walton shrugged his shoulders indifferently. "Perhaps I do and perhaps I don't," he sneered. "Anyhow you've got to prove it before I hand over a cent. Go to law, if you choose! You'll find it slow and expensive, and you can't produce a single witness. I took good care of that!" And snapping his fingers almost in Mr. Carroll's face, he marched out humming a tune.

That night, as ill-luck would have it, Carter brought home a polite but positive note from his principal saying that unless he brought up his school work he could not hope to keep on in his present class. He hated to show it to his father but he had to have the signature

of both parents before he could return it. He waited until he found him alone in the library, then handed it to him without a word, standing by with downcast eyes while he read it.

"This is a fine report, is n't it?" his father said angrily. Poor man, it seemed very much like the last straw on an already over-burdened camel. Carter was his only child and he was anxious for him to make the most of his schooldays. He realized that the boy was taking his work far too lightly.

"What excuse have you to offer for such disgraceful marks as these?" he demanded, striking the paper sharply with his hand as he spoke.

"I have n't any excuse, sir," was the truthful answer.

"Too much play, my boy!" his father said sternly. "Too much sport and bicycle and brigade, and too little study! I'll give you one more month to bring your standing up to the requirements. If the next report is not far better than this one, I'll take away your wheel and your tent, and your camera, and your uniform. Yes, sir! I'll take away your dog, too, until you can do fair work. Your Aunt Alice will be glad to have Dixie."

This was too much for Carter.

"But I can't give up old Doodles," he declared earnestly. "I can't! You know I can't! You know how much I think of him! Why he's almost like a — a brother, he's so fond of me!"

"Then do your school work as you should, and earn the right to keep him," was the decisive answer: but as

he spoke Mr. Carroll laid a loving hand on his boy's head, and patted the small dog with the other. "We should all miss this little fellow, Car. Don't make me send him away. You ought to learn a motto that helped me when I was your age, my boy. 'Keeping everlastingly at it brings success!' And it's the only thing that does," he added earnestly.

Carter promised to work harder. Then he petted Dixie for a few moments feeling as though the small dog had almost been snatched from his arms.

"Master could n't spare this old fellow, could he, Doodles? No, sir! could n't possibly spare him! You don't want to go to Aunt Allie."

Dixie wagged his tail in energetic denial of any such longings: Aunt Allie might live in a beautiful house with fine grounds, but it would n't be home for him, no, sir!

"I guess I'd better set to work and not talk so much," the boy declared suddenly, putting the small dog down. "I'm going to pitch in hard and keep everlastingly at it, too!"

A few weeks later another note came from the principal, but this time Carter was eager to take it to his father. Mr. Carroll read it through, a pleased light in his eyes.

"This shows what you can do if you try," he said approvingly. "You are invited to stay, Dickums," he added to the small dog. "This is not a gilt-edged invitation exactly," holding up the note, "but it is just as good, is n't it, Car?"

The "S. I. G.'s" had a paper chase early on Thanksgiving morning and afterwards went to the football game on the school field. Carter and Sid returned in time for dinner with cheeks red from the cold wind, and appetites sharpened by exercise. Mrs. Carroll met them at the door.

"Go right upstairs and get ready for dinner, boys," she ordered. "Minnie says it's almost ready. I'll give you fifteen minutes to dress."

"Um-m-m! does n't it smell good?" Carter asked, sniffing the air hungrily.

"Has the mail come in yet, Mrs. Carroll?" Sid hung behind to inquire. "It seems an age since I heard from mother."

"No — it is n't in — that is, the English mail," she answered. "But there's a letter for you from New York. Wait!" she commanded, as he started back after it. "Here it is. Now hurry!"

The boys needed no urging. The odor of roasting turkey was very apparent, an appetizing odor at any time, but doubly so to boys who have covered miles of country on a sharp trot, after a very early, very hurried breakfast. The allotted fifteen minutes had not passed when they rushed downstairs again and made straight for the dining-room. Mrs. Carroll sprang to intercept them but only caught Sid, as Carter had already dashed into the room.

"Why, what —" he was beginning when he looked up and caught his mother's eyes fixed upon him. She placed a warning finger on her lips, and he very cleverly

finished his sentence, "What's the matter with Dixie? He's all right!"

Dinner seemed destined to be a very formal affair judging from the length of time it took for Minnie to put it on the table, but after what seemed like an interminable wait the chimes sounded. Mr. Carroll gallantly offered his arm to his wife, and the boys, carrying Dixie between them on crossed arms, fell in behind. The small dog also liked turkey, and was as hungrily eager as the rest of the family. The procession marched clear into the room before Sid looked up. When he did he gave an inarticulate exclamation, and dropping his arms so suddenly that Dixie landed on the floor with a thud, he flew over to the smiling lady who stood beside the table, and fairly hurled himself into her arms. She pressed him close without a word although her face spoke whole volumes of mother love and mother longing. Then the man beside her put his arm around Sid's shoulder.

"I must have my share, too, my boy," he said earnestly.

Later they both tried to thank the Carrolls for the loving care they had bestowed on their boy, but found that words failed them utterly. The Carrolls seemed to understand, however.

"I love Sid dearly," Mrs. Carroll told Sid's mother when they were alone. "It has been a pleasure to have him with us. He seems to have the best sort of influence over Carter. I'm thankful he will still be right here on the block."

"So am I," Mrs. Armstrong echoed fervently. "This has been a genuine Thanksgiving! Things are going so well with us!"

But Mrs. Carroll sighed involuntarily: things were not going well with them.

CHAPTER XXI

Christmas

DIXIE had slept on a box of straw in the laundry ever since he had lived with the Carrolls. Once or twice, as cold weather approached, he seemed reluctant to go to his box when ordered by Carter at bedtime. One Friday night, two weeks before Christmas, he hung back, looking longingly at the cosy fire, his brown eyes speaking as plainly as words could have done: "I don't want to go to my box! I want to stay right here!"

The wind from the bay was howling around the house, its weird "woo-o-o-o! woo-o-o-o!" sending creepy shivers up and down sensitive spines. All the storm windows were closed and the heavy portières drawn over the long glass doors that opened on the piazza. Carter had telephoned to Sid and the "I.'s", and the four had spent a jolly evening roasting apples and toasting marshmallows before the library fire while Ida told them the plot of a story she was reading. She was a good story-teller, and knew how to hold the interest of her listeners. Then they cleared the dining-table and had a lively game of ping-pong before separating for the night.

When Carter returned after taking the girls home, Dixie still lay on the rug before the fire, looking both comfortable and contented.

"Thought I told you to go to bed, sir," he said, stooping to roll the small dog over and tickle him. "What? You don't want to? Mother, Dixie says he does n't want to sleep in the laundry any more, it's too cold!"

The Carrolls often put speeches into the small dog's mouth. Sometimes they found it a convenient way of expressing their own wants or opinions.

"He may sleep in the kitchen to-night, if he wants to," Mrs. Carroll offered kindly. "Perhaps it is cold in the laundry on a night like this."

"Anything the matter with the little fat rascal?" Mr. Carroll asked, poking him playfully in the ribs. "He is n't sick, is he? Turn around here, sir, and let me feel that little black nose of yours."

"His nose is cold — he's all right," Carter answered; "but it's icy in the laundry, honestly it is."

"Oh, nonsense!" Mr. Carroll laughed at the idea. "This little heathen's coat is thick, is n't it, Dickums?"

But in spite of Mr. Carroll's scoffing, Mrs. Carroll placed a pillow under the kitchen table and Dixie promptly took possession of it. When Carter went in to "shake paws" with him, the boy shivered; after the range fire was out, even the kitchen was cold on such a windy night.

"Sleep tight, old fellow and don't let Jack Frost get you. Ugh! He will at this rate, I'm afraid. Wait a minute, Dix! I'll fix you all right."

He hurried up to the attic and hunted about until he found the fur coat with which Mrs. Harper had

transformed the small dog into a lion for the "S. I. G.'s" show. The big safety pins were still in it. He fastened it about Dixie's body and the dog settled down looking cosy and contented.

It must have been after two o'clock when Mr. Carroll awoke with a start. He sat up in bed and listened, thinking that he might have been dreaming. No! there it came again, scratch, scratch, scratch! At first he was at a loss to understand it, but a low whine soon made the cause clear — it was Dixie scratching frantically outside Carter's door; but Carter was sleeping the sleep of the just, or of an active boy which is equally sound.

"There! I told you so!" Mr. Carroll remarked aloud. "I knew that little scalawag would disturb us if he slept in the kitchen."

"Go see what he wants," Mrs. Carroll urged. "There must be something the matter. Perhaps the little fellow is sick."

Mr. Carroll muttered something that sounded like "I'll make him sick for waking me out of a sound sleep!" but he got up obediently and opened the door into the hall.

"Here, you little nuisance!" he called crossly, as the cold air in the hall struck through his pajamas, making his teeth chatter. "What's the matter with you?"

Dixie jumped up on him, then ran towards the stairs and back again, whining and barking so frantically that at last Mr. Carroll followed him. He had no sooner reached the top of the stairs, than he felt an icy draft

from below which sent him down two steps at a time. Hurriedly switching on the electric light he saw that both the glass doors and the storm doors leading from the dining-room to the piazza were wide open. A bulging burlap sack lay on the floor near the buffet. Mr. Carroll stared about the room in speechless amazement, then stooped and patted the little animal that was sniffing and nosing about near the bag, growling angrily as he did so.

"So that 's what you were trying to tell me, old boy!"

An examination of the contents of the bag showed that it was filled with silver, some of which he recognized instantly — the tea set from the buffet, and several small pieces from the silver drawer. He looked decidedly grave as he hauled out one thing after another, expecially when he came to a chamois-lined case containing the set of quaint old spoons that had belonged to Carter's great-great-grandmother in Virginia. They were family heirlooms that were almost priceless because they could never be replaced.

"Whew!" he whistled softly. "And it's all my fault, too! I forgot all about the silver. This is a close shave all right: you must have frightened him away just in time, old fellow. They can't get ahead of Dickums, can they?"

While he was petting the dog Mrs. Carroll hurried downstairs holding something at arm's length. Her husband started when he saw what it was.

"Put that down, Eve," he commanded sharply. "I'm

not afraid of you, nor of the pistol, but I'm afraid of the combination."

"Don't be worried," she answered easily. "I know how to shoot."

"But there's no one to shoot, thanks to old Dickums, here. Just look! whoever it was almost got off with his booty."

"But Dickey Bird could n't scare anyone. He's too little."

"Could n't he? You forget this lion coat of his! He's a pretty sizable dog right this minute. I'd be afraid of him myself if I met him in the dark. The Carroll spoons had a narrow escape. We'll put them away after this."

"I can't understand Minnie," Mrs. Carroll remarked severely. "She's never forgotten the silver before."

"And she did n't this time, dear. Jim was waiting to take her to the church social, so I told her I'd carry up the silver."

"And this is the way — "

"I did n't do it! I'm sorry, but I completely forgot it. If it had n't been for old 'sharp ears' here, it would have been a minus quantity in the morning. This is n't the first call the man made evidently. There's some of the Boyntons' things in the bag. We'll be as welcome as Santa Claus when we go on our silver distributing round to-morrow. I hope all the articles belong on the block so that we can return them without trouble. Come on: I'm half frozen. Good-night, old boy. No more laundry for you!"

"He'll be wanting to sleep upstairs next!" Mrs. Carroll prophesied laughingly, as Dixie showed plainly that he would go up with them then and there if they insisted on it.

"He may when he's earned it as he has this!" was the laughing response.

When Carter returned the silverware the next morning he found that the boys had all gone to New York to look at the Christmas displays. He wanted to go too, but his mother refused.

"We have n't the money to spare this year," she explained gently. "Carfare and lunch count up so, and besides we have n't any purchases to make. I'm sorry to disappoint you because we always enjoy our day's shopping, but this year it is simply out of the question."

"Can't we buy any presents at all for Christmas?" he asked incredulously.

Mrs. Carroll shook her head.

"Not many! Of course we'll remember Minnie, and one or two who would miss it most, but the new house won't be ready to rent until spring, and your father can't get a cent from Mr. Walton. Even if he sued him he would probably lose: he has no proof. Anyway, it's too expensive to test it. Never mind the Christmas presents, Car! We can have the Christmas spirit — 'Peace on earth, good will towards men': that means more than presents after all. Try to help your father by being as cheerful as you can, won't you?"

"Sure!" the boy replied, but even as he promised he felt that the Christmas spirit was well enough but that Christmas presents were even better. Boy-like it never occurred to him that he might have denied himself during the year and saved his own money for the presents. "But if I had that old Walton, I'd —"

"Gently, my son, gently! I want my boy —"

She stopped suddenly at the sound of a loud whistle followed by a sharp ring at the door bell. Carter hurried out for the mail.

"Hey, mother! Oh, mother!" he shouted excitedly an instant later. "It's for me!"

When she reached the hall she found him with an unopened letter in his hand, intently studying the superscription.

"It's from the paper. Here's their name on the outside. It must be about the story. Do you think mine has won a prize, or just that they are going to print it?"

"I think you could answer all those questions yourself, if you'd open the letter," she answered, smiling at his earnestness.

As he hurriedly slit the envelope with his knife and pulled out the letter a slip of thin paper fell out too, and circled slowly down until it hit Dixie Doodle on his upturned nose; but both Carter and his mother were too intent on the contents of the letter to notice what had happened. Carter read it aloud, even to the name of the paper, and its daily circulation, duly attested, printed in one corner of the sheet.

"MASTER LINDSAY CARTERET CARROLL,

"Staten Island.

"DEAR SIR, — We take pleasure in sending you our cheque for twenty dollars, the second prize in our Great Prize Story Contest. Your clever little story 'Outside the Hook' will be printed in the Story Page of our paper, on the Saturday before Christmas. There was a regular outbreak of 'Outside the Hook' stories in your neighborhood: it must have been very catching! They were all so different, however, that we feel sure the coincidence was purely accidental. Our judges unanimously decided that yours and one by Master Sidney Armstrong were the best of them all. They think it must be a true story; is it? We congratulate you. There were hundreds of stories sent in, so success means something to be proud of.

"Respectfully yours,

"THE PRIZE STORY EDITOR."

Carter read the letter over a second time as though fascinated by it, and strange to say the fact that his story was to be printed made a deeper impression upon him, just at first, than the winning of the prize.

"'We take pleasure in sending you our cheque,'" he read again. "But they have n't sent it! Do you suppose it 's been lost or stolen?" he asked anxiously.

Before his mother could answer a slight rustling attracted his attention. Dixie was pawing at the bit of paper daintily, its crispness making it move about in a way which delighted him.

"Here it is!" he exclaimed in relieved tones. "'Pay to Lindsay Carteret Carroll — Twenty Dollars.' Whew!"

He dashed to the telephone and gave his aunt's number.

"Hello, Aunt Allie!" he began when his aunt herself answered the call. "My nice fat idea must have been dressed up all right because I 've won one of the prizes! . . . Yes 'm: the second — twenty! Is n't that great? . . . I don't know about that: one swallow does n't make a summer, so I 'm afraid one story won't make an author, either! What shall I get you for Christmas? . . . All right. Good-bye!"

He was laughing heartily as he hung up the receiver.

"She says that if I won't give Dixie Doodle to her, I must get her a dog of some kind. Come on! if we rush we can catch the ten-thirty ferry. I 'll invite you to lunch, Mrs. Carroll, but not at the Waldorf or Sherry's, please!"

"All right," his mother responded, as pleased as he over his success. "Make out your list before we start: it will save time in town."

Carter was already half way upstairs, but checked himself abruptly, and stood gazing at his prize with thoughtful earnestness.

"I — I guess we won't go in after all," he decided. "You won't mind, will you?"

"But why?" Mrs. Carroll demanded, surprised at his sudden change.

"I think I 'll give the cheque to father," he said quietly.

Mrs. Carroll patted his hand as it lay on the banister.

"I 'm glad you are trying to help him, because he never forgets his boy; but really, Car, this is n't necessary. We may not have money for the 'flesh pots' but

we 're not at starvation point yet awhile. These months are hard for us simply because the payment for those two big contracts has been delayed, and Mr. Walton's money was to have carried us through this time. Father says business will be better after New Year. We 'll have our day in town by all means, and buy your presents. I 'm delighted that you have this money. You may get something extra nice for your father if you wish. He 'll appreciate it all the more because you have earned the money. But I don't know about Aunt Allie's dog, though!"

"We 'll find one all right!" Carter answered as, with a relieved sigh, he raced upstairs to dress.

They spent a busy day, and Carter himself chose the restaurant and ordered the luncheon — chicken pie, hot chocolate, ice-cream and cake. Mrs. Carroll said it made her feel as though she had lost her boy, but she enjoyed both lunch and shopping as much as he did.

They found what Aunt Allie wanted after prolonged search. It was a tiny dog sitting erect in the sauciest manner — in reality a cushion for collar and lace pins. Carter was delighted with it: for once he had succeeded in being the joker instead of the joked!

He chose an embroidered linen cover for his mother's tea table. He had heard her say that she wanted one. She was at the handkerchief counter when he picked it out. For his father he bought a pocket edition of Kipling's works, an author of whom Mr. Carroll was very fond; and for Minnie he decided upon collar pins and a box of letter paper, and for Dixie a new collar. He also

arranged to have three small purses made from his share of the skin of the rattler that he and Sid had killed at the lakes. One was to be given to each of the "I.'s" and the third was for Mrs. Harper who, though still abroad, was not forgotten by the "S. I. G.'s." The last letter from her had brought a most encouraging report. The "bone doctor" as the boys persisted in calling the great osteopath, had located the cause of her trouble, and was treating the hip which she had injured several years before in a fall from her horse. Already she was walking about unaided by crutches or help of any kind, and the great physician promised a slow but sure cure. The purse would not reach her in time for Christmas, but would answer for a New Year's gift.

The day before Christmas Carter dashed into the library unexpectedly, and to his consternation, found his mother sobbing heart-brokenly. She was usually so bright and cheerful that he could not find words to fit such a disheartening situation, so he smoothed her hair in awkward, boyish sympathy.

"It — it does n't seem like Christmas this year," she said, trying hard to control herself. "And to think that I am to blame for losing that note! How much trouble it has caused!"

"But grandfather and Aunt Alice have plenty of money," he urged. "Why don't father get some from them?"

"Because he prefers to be independent, and so do I!" she explained proudly. "Your father is n't the kind of man to rely on others if he can do a thing himself.

That 's why every one respects him so highly. Poor man! I 'm afraid he won't find much cheer in this Christmas, but he 'll enjoy his boy's gift, though," she added quickly, once more her brave, cheerful self. "When are you going to tell him about the prize, dear? Is Sid keeping his a secret, too?"

"Yes. He got the third prize, fifteen dollars. Queer they should take both stories, was n't it? But they said they were different. I 'll tell father about it after breakfast to-morrow. I 'm going to dress Dixie up, too. Do you think a yellow bow would show up well on his new collar? Yellow goes with brown, does n't it? Anyway, it will come next to his white shirt-front."

"White shirt-front!" his mother exclaimed in well simulated surprise. "I don't see any white shirt-front! I see a very dirty little dog with a dingy gray patch under his neck."

"Oh pshaw! you know what I mean!" Carter exclaimed impatiently. "I 've been so busy I forgot to bathe him."

"Yes, you have been busy — playing!" his mother replied with mild sarcasm. "For a baseball team I must say the 'S. I. G.'s' find plenty to do."

"Of course we do! We called ourselves a baseball nine just to do up the 'Stars,' and we did. Don't you believe in the club?" he inquired, genuine anxiety in his tones.

"Indeed I do!" she assured him emphatically. "It has helped you boys more than you realize, and I hope you will keep it up. I 'm only sorry that I could

not give you a different kind of a party to-morrow night."

"Don't worry about that! The boys would rather have games and fun, and a jolly little spread like we 're going to have, than a stiff old dress-up and dance affair, honestly they would, mother! But tell me about the bow for Dixie's collar. I found a red one and a yellow one in that box of yours. Which will look best? I 'll clean him first," he added hurriedly, as his mother started to speak. "Come on, old boy, and get your bath," he said teasingly. "BATH! did you hear, Dix? B-a-t-h!"

Dixie heard. He knew the word well and oh! how he hated it! His dread of the water extended even to warm water in the bath tub. At the first mention of "bath" he had put his tail between his legs and slunk under the couch. When Carter reached for him he made a dash, squeezed through the partly opened door, and flew up the steps, Carter chasing after him as fast as he could run.

"You old rascal!" he exclaimed. "You might as well take it easy. Mr. Smarty! you 're in for a scrubbing as sure as to-morrow 's Christmas!"

Dixie paused an instant in the second story hall, then flew on like a little brown streak up to the attic, to his own special retreat. This was a narrow space beneath some shelves near the chimney. A curtain draped the front of the shelves so that entrance was easy at all times. More than once had the small dog, crouching far back in the darkness eluded the boys'

search, but to-day he had very little the start of his pursuer. Still all would have been well had he not stumbled over a box that had been pushed beneath the curtain. Something fell with a bang, and the frightened little animal cowered down in the farthest corner, licking the paw he had hit sharply against the obstacle as he scrambled in.

Carter had only reached the head of the stairs, but, guided by the racket, he got down on his knees and tried to peer beneath the curtain. He could see nothing in the darkness, so he reached in after his prey.

"Can't fool me, Mr. Dix! I 've caught you this time! So this is where you 've been hiding, is it? You 're a great one! Ouch!"

He, too, had struck a sharp corner of the box, and he followed Dixie's example by sucking the knuckle energetically to lessen the pain. Then he reached in more carefully and removed the obstacle. It proved to be a good sized tin box, the cover of which had been knocked off as Dixie entered. He was about to push it aside and reach in again after the dog when a paper lying on the very top of the pile caught his eye. One corner had been gnawed by mice, but a few words scrawled across the top in his father's handwriting attracted his attention.

"Promissory no —

"Isaac P. Wa —"

The rest was gone, but he had read enough. He opened the paper with such eager haste that he tore it in two.

"It can't be! It can't be!" he muttered joyfully, knowing all the time that it was. "Five Thousand Dollars," he read. "Whew! won't this settle him though, the old cheat!"

In his wild excitement he forgot all about Dixie of the dingy shirt-front, and sped down the stairs three steps at a time, shouting at the top of his voice. Mrs. Carroll heard him and rushed into the hall just as he reached the lower landing. Her face was pale with fright as he sprang towards her, waving the pieces of paper frantically before her eyes.

"Here it is! Here it is! Doodles found it up in the attic! Won't it be a dandy present for father, though! Dixie found it, honestly he did!"

Mrs. Carroll seized the papers, gave one glance, then sank down on the lowest step sobbing unrestrainedly for the second time that day. Carter was dumfounded, it was so unlike his sunny-tempered, self-controlled mother. He touched her hair gently, murmuring: "Please don't, mother! Please don't! I 'm sorry!" but what he was sorry for he had not the faintest idea. Suddenly her tears changed to smiles and she fairly beamed upon him. Dixie had crept downstairs to see what the commotion was about, and she gathered him up in her arms and hugged him tight while Carter explained where and how the note had been discovered.

"And I thought I had searched every nook and corner in the whole house," she said at last.

"But you 'd hardly notice this place, mother. It 's only a few inches space beneath the lowest shelf and

the curtain covers it. Even Dixie can't hide in it much longer if he gets any fatter than he is."

"I remember now," his mother said thoughtfully. "I told Minnie to put that box away, the day I cleaned the small desk. I never stopped to examine the papers in it, because I thought they were just old cheques. It's queer that it should have escaped my mind so completely. And to think that Dickey Bird will have the best present of all for master," she ended, patting the smooth, brown head lovingly while the dog placed his front paws on her shoulders and tried to kiss her face.

They decided to say nothing of the recovery of the note that night, but to surprise Mr. Carroll the next day. Fortunately they would not have to keep the secret long.

On Christmas morning Carter tried to slip downstairs early but his father heard him.

"Not so fast, my boy. It's not five o'clock yet. Go back until Minnie comes down and opens up the furnace."

"But I won't stay down," Carter began to expostulate. "I'll open the furnace. I just want to see my presents, then I'll —"

"You'll wait, as I said," his father replied firmly, and Carter, not daring to disobey, went back into his room. He regretted that he had not slipped upstairs to wake Minnie before his father overheard him. Two hours seemed an age when he did not know what treasures were awaiting him downstairs in the library. It

was a holiday, so Minnie would be even later than seven, probably. He stood it as long as he could, then he climbed up on the headboard of his bed and began a cautious "tap-tap-tapping" on his ceiling. It was some time before his manœuvre produced any result, and he was afraid to pound harder for fear of disturbing his father and mother, but he kept it up until he heard Minnie walking about above him. Then he scrambled into his clothes and without waiting for finishing touches in the way of collar, tie, and coat, he threw his bath robe about him. A few minutes later he heard Minnie go down, and the instant the click of turning dampers reached him he flew downstairs. The furnace had been turned on: he was obeying the letter of his father's injunction, if not the spirit. Anyway, Christmas only came once a year.

As he gazed at the array in the library he realized that his father might be poor but Santa Claus was evidently in good circumstances. There was a set of books he had longed for, a passe-partouting outfit, a new camera, and a splendid miniature bowling board, almost ten feet long, to be played with small pins and balls, and a billiard cue. This and the work bench equipped with a complete set of tools, absorbed his whole attention for a time. His grandfather had sent the bowling table, and his father and mother had had the work bench made for him. Even in the excitement of the day he appreciated the loving denial that had gone into it. Mrs. Harper had sent him an imposing looking bill purse with a crisp dollar bill in it. She

called it a "nest-egg" for his new year's savings. The Armstrongs had brought home a fine pair of field glasses for his gift. In the note from Sid he called them "Camp Protectors!" The "S. I. G.'s" had all sent remembrances, simple little things, but each one representing a boy's devotion to his club leader.

It was some time before he discovered Aunt Allie's gift, not because it was small, but because it was in the corner of the library farthest from the rest of the presents. It was a phonograph with a case filled with records. He read the titles over gloatingly, his fingers fairly itching to try the instrument. Only the fact that it was not yet six o'clock prevented him from starting the music then and there.

A letter addressed to him in his aunt's writing, hung from the huge horn by a holly-flowered ribbon. He laughed as he read it.

"DEAR HONEY-BOY,— Promise not to let the cats sing when I come over, won't you? I don't mind Caruso very much, or even the whistling records, or those farm-yard cantatas you spoke of, but I'll dispense with the feline chorus. Wishing the successful author a very Merry Christmas.

"With love,

"AUNT ALICE.

"P. S. Go gently with the records, Car; say one a day with a handkerchief stuffed in the horn. I am anxious to spare your family as much as possible. I'll be over at three to take you and Sid out for a spin on the boulevard. Tell mother I'm bringing the candies and some surprise packages for your club party. They will do for favors at the table. I have some trophies for the bowling contest, too — some things I bought in Paris. Merry Christmas to all!"

After breakfast Mr. and Mrs. Carroll were sitting in the dining-room talking in low tones, while Carter was busy in the pantry between the dining-room and the kitchen, fixing the surprise for his father. Minnie was singing away at the top of her voice as she worked about the kitchen.

"Noah built himself an ark,
One more river to cross.
He pitched it within and without with bark,
One more river to cross."

"Hey, Min, what river is it?" Carter called out.

"Sure, it's the Ohio River," Minnie answered with a laugh. "I'm from Ohio where the Presidents grow!" This was a standing joke of Minnie's.

"Go on, Min, and sing some more verses," he urged, and Minnie started in with a will.

"The animals went in one by one,
One more river to cross.
Noah led with a big bass-drum,
One more river to cross.

"The animals went in two by two,
One more river to cross,
The elephant and the kangaroo,
One more river to cross.

"The animals went in three by three,
One more river to cross.
The rhinoc'ros and the bumble-bee,
One more river to cross.

"The animals went in four by four,
One more river to cross.
The hippo-po-TA-mus stuck in the door,
One more river to cross."

Mr. Carroll winked at his wife and whispered mischievously: "I'm not surprised that the hippo-po-TA-mus stuck in the door, are you? Minnie 's been piling those animals into that ark ever since she got up."

"That 's great, Min!" Carter called out admiringly. He was tying an official envelope on Dixie's back, with bright colored Christmas ribbons as he spoke, but boy-like, he could attend to several things at once, when he cared about them. "Give us the rest of the verses, do!" he urged.

"I can't, Carter," Minnie's tone was plainly regretful: she loved to sing. "There's a lot more of 'em, but I must get my turkey ready an' make the puddin' sauce, unless you want to beat it up for me."

Carter preserved a discreet silence that was non-committal. He did n't object to beating up hard sauce occasionally, but this was Christmas day. Minnie did not urge him. She was in a gay humor. Mr. Carroll had given her a five-dollar gold piece and Mrs. Carroll a pretty red silk waist. Jim, the grocery man, liked red. She also had Carter's collar pins and the box of letter paper, and a bottle of cologne from Dixie, while the Armstrongs had sent her a whole box of kid gloves, and Jim's present was still to come. No wonder she felt musical!

Carter whistled softly when the surprise was arranged to his satisfaction, and Mrs. Carroll promptly answered the signal.

"What's that for?" Mr. Carroll asked curiously.

"I thought men never displayed curiosity," she

answered teasingly; "but you give a pretty fair imitation of it at times, I must say! Call Dixie!"

"Why?"

"Curiosity again!"

Mr. Carroll laughed and promptly whistled for the dog. Dixie as promptly appeared, prancing in with a comical wriggling of his little brown body. He objected to having things tied upon him, whether harness or surprises, and he was doing his best to rid himself of the burden. But Mr. Carroll called him and he sprang upon his lap.

"What's this?" he asked, touching the small dog's decoration.

"Your present from Dixie," Mrs. Carroll answered. "Open it, dear."

Mr. Carroll complied expecting to find a Christmas card. When he saw what it was, he held the pieces of the note, one in each hand, and looked from one to the other for an instant in speechless surprise. His voice was scarcely under control when he finally asked:

"Where did you find it?"

Mrs. Carroll, who was perched upon one arm of his chair, gave him a full account of the affair, helped at intervals by Carter, who was perched on the other arm, while Dixie Doodle settled down comfortably on his lap. He listened with intense interest, then put his arms around all three of them as he tried to express his pleasure.

"Business conditions are improving every day," he explained to them. "With this," pointing to the note,

"to tide me over, we'll start in the coming year in good shape. The new house will be ready by the first of May, the architect tells me. I've already rented it."

"That's good!" Mrs. Carroll tried to speak heartily but did not succeed. The new house was even more satisfactory than the other had been. She had watched it grow into a thing of beauty and comfort with genuine delight. "Who is to live in it?"

"You are!" he answered promptly, well aware of her longing.

She simply stared for an instant, then she hid her head on his shoulder and shed a few tears, but they were tears of happiness.

"Hurrah!" Carter shouted, as soon as he realized what his father's words meant to them all. "The 'S. I. G.'s' can have the garage, can't we, father? It will make a dandy club house."

His father nodded.

"And think of the tower room with all those windows, Car!" his mother burst forth excitedly. "That's to be yours."

Just then Minnie began to beat the sauce for the pudding, at the same time starting in with tuneful vigor on a new song, the animals having been left to much needed rest.

"Oh! I am so happy! so happy! so happy!
Oh! I am so happy! so happy all day long!"

"And so are we," Mr. Carroll said fervently.

"Indeed we are," Mrs. Carroll agreed.

"Dixie 's happy too," Carter declared. "He's graduated from the kitchen, have n't you, old boy? After this you'll sleep upstairs with the rest of the family. I'm going to tell the fellows about the garage. We're a real club with a real club house now. We'll make things hum next year all right! Won't it be slick, though!"

"Good luck to the 'S. I. G.'s' new club house!" Mr. Carroll exclaimed as Carter dashed out full of his good news.

"And to the 'S. I. G.'s' captain, too!" Mrs. Carroll added. Then they looked at each other and smiled: at last things were going well with them.

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